上一代

黑楊 方蘇

田園書屋
15 7.04
2385 8031

ISBN 962-86063-1-X

9 789628 606313

HK$85

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026 with funding from
University of Toronto

https://archive.org/details/31761099622276

上一代

上一代

黑楊
方蘇

楊方創作室

HKS(L)

楊方創作室 2000年出版
香港郵政總局信箱342號

國際標準書號 962-86063-1-X

版權所有 © 黑楊，方蘇

香港印製
卓越印刷有限公司承印

封面
中文　上岸　方蘇　2000年
英文　香港大澳　黑楊　2000年

彩頁圖版
1-15　黑楊攝影
16-32　方蘇繪畫

本書封面及圖頁15-32採用香港大學美術博物館出版《城市生活：方蘇繪畫》展覽圖冊中的圖版。
攝影：潘榮健，羅森

未經出版人書面同意，不得以任何形式翻用本出版物任何部分，不得以電子、機械、影印、錄製音像或其他任何形式予以翻製，不得儲存於可翻尋的系統中或予以傳播。

給彭小芬

謝語

家家有本難唸的經，但家裏的問題又往往不足為外人道。因此，要寫兩代人之間並不愉快的關係，很難下筆。我寫這本書，全靠一些朋友的支持和幫助。這本書也使我更加了解我的父母和我自己。

這本書的構思，是看了方蘇這兩年寫的部分札記之後想到的。過去兩年，我和他一起從事創作，他畫畫，我寫書。在他的札記中，他也曾提到他與父母的關係，還提及他和我之間很不容易的關係。

在這本書的卷首，我向曾經幫助過我的朋友致謝：艾絲珀・希堪斯為我編校英文版本，林志明和陳培生校閱中文版本並且提供寶貴意見。我要特別感謝彭小芬，她替我編校我的第一本短篇小說集，在我開始全職寫作時給了我極大的支持和鼓勵。

黑楊　二〇〇〇年十二月

1

方蘇的父親病重時，我和方蘇正展開第一次冷戰，起因是我不肯告訴他關於我幾個舊男朋友的事。

「我的過去屬於我，不屬於你。」我向着電話筒大叫。

經驗教懂我，戀愛時給對方講太多舊戀情，不見得有益。我的幾個舊男朋友都愛講他們的愛情故事，偏是我也愛聽，於是他們愈講愈投入，每講一遍，劇情就豐富一點，令我覺得他們根本擺脫不了在舊戀情中擔任的角色。聽完幾個動人的故事後，我們都是分手收場。

「喂，聽我講，我要上廣州。」方蘇匆匆說。「老父病了，進了醫院。先告訴你一聲，怕你有事找我。」

「甚麼時候回來？」他父親入院的消息令我吃了一驚。

「盡快，要趕回來出雜誌。」

當時方蘇是《九十年代》的編輯。他在廣州只留了一天，第二天就回來了。正忙於趕着出雜誌時，傳來他父親去世的消息，幾天後他又要到廣州奔喪。

「喪禮很短，很簡單。十五分鐘，也許連十五分鐘也不到。來了十幾個親戚。大家在靈堂門口等，等了差不多半個鐘頭，才見棺木推出來。棺木很簡陋，只有個樣子。接着有人出來宣佈：方平灼先生遺體告別儀式現在開始。那人按了一下鈕，響起了哀樂。殯儀館是國營的，播的哀樂和國家領導人喪禮上播的一樣，不過只放了十幾秒鐘，隨即向遺體三鞠躬，大家鞠完了躬，那人接着就宣佈禮成，清場。」方蘇說得很慢，好像這些話說不出口。令他不安的似乎不是他父親的去世，而是喪禮太草率。

「廣州只有一所殯儀館，永遠客滿。我同父異母的哥哥認識火葬場的人，特別叫人調高爐溫，說是燒剩的骨頭會完整些。」方蘇繼續說，我不知他是在對我說，還是對自己說。「大陸已禁了土葬，但很多人還是希望能燒剩整塊的骨頭，把骨頭下葬。」

「葬在哪裏？」

「鄉下。廣州連葬骨灰的地方都沒有，只有葬在鄉下。」

接着方蘇和我都沉默良久，但仍不知道要怎樣走出冷戰的陰影。

方蘇的父親對於我是個陌生人。我只知道方蘇的母親是他的第二個妻子。結婚時，他在鄉下已經有妻兒。方蘇認為他父親當時隱瞞了婚姻狀況。

「死時他有一隻眼睛沒閉上。」過了好一陣，方蘇又像自言自語說。「行禮前，我看到殯儀館的人花了一點工夫，拉下他的眼瞼。」

「他有未了的心願？」我問。聽我媽說，外祖母去世時就不肯閉眼，後來媽向她的遺體說：「不要擔心，我會照顧我的兄弟，看着他們成家立室。」說完再輕掃外祖母的眼瞼，外祖母才閉上眼。

「或者他不甘心死在廣州。」

「他想死在哪裏？鄉下？」

「不。香港，或者美國。五十年代初，他在香港住過幾個月，但我祖母叫他回廣州，他就回去了。我父親五歲喪父，祖母一手帶大他，祖母的話他不能不聽。我媽和哥哥移民到美國後，老父一直想去美國。也許是這個原因，他才撐到八十六歲。他一直在等。」

「你哥哥申請他去美國了？」

「他以為我哥哥會。他跟我哥哥說過，某某人的兒子申請父親到美國去了。」

很快我就忘記了方蘇的父親。當時我以為，他的逝去，只是令方蘇和我更感到生命的無常，無意再冷戰。

六個月後，方蘇的父親竟出現在我面前。那是一張方蘇畫的粉彩。粉彩後來畫成了五尺的水墨畫。聽方蘇的哥哥說過，他父親脾氣極壞，把他的一隻耳朵都打壞了，使他現在要用助聽器。但宣紙上的老人神情惶惑，頭上壓了頂緊繃繃、重重的帽子。

當時我在寫小說，寫一個中年女人與她父母的關係，故事的背景是香港和大陸。我問方蘇關於他父親的往事，但他所知很少，只說得出他父親曾在國民黨軍隊的軍需處當過小職員。一九四九年共產黨建政後，他一直無業。死前他和第一個妻子及她生的兒子住在廣州。方蘇極少去看他。

過了幾個月，方蘇說記得在一次政治運動中，他父親從家中失蹤了差不多一個星期。

2

「你爸媽的確麻煩，但他們都老了。如果我像他們一樣經歷那麼多轉變，又要逃難，又要在殖民地謀生，我也不知自己會變成怎樣……」每次我抱怨父母時，方蘇總是這樣說。

方蘇父親的死，使我對父母心軟起來。加上當時我打算不再做工，專心寫作，爸媽一定會很嘮叨。爸會罵我賺不到錢，「有鬼用」。我索性做工時多見他們幾次，不做工時就躲起來。

因為有方蘇做和平大使，我和爸媽居然吃了一頓沒有太多火藥味的飯。媽甚至說：「哈哈，一起吃了那麼多次飯，這次最開心了。」

吃飯時，我談及在泰國和柬埔寨旅行時遇上的星相師。亞洲金融風暴爆發後，占卜算命成了興旺的行業，所以我在旅途中做了些訪問。

爸媽從來極少聽我說話，但對這個話題的反應出乎我的意料。

「講完亞洲的運程，那星相師突然問我有幾個兄弟姊妹。我說了後他竟搖頭，說應該還有一個。我才想起媽說過，有個弟弟出生不久就死了。那相士大概想露一手。」我誇張地複述我和相士的對話。

「他預言了些甚麼？」爸問。

「他說亞洲還會有苦日子……」我說。

「嘿！這樣的說話，我也會講，用不着找星相師。潮退了，香港的好運也走完了……」我媽立刻大聲說。

「用不着這麼緊張！吃的，穿的，都是命中註定……」爸皺着眉頭說。

「你外祖母也懂看相，她讀過四書五經，但閑來喜歡看麻衣相書。手相、面相，她都懂……」媽提高聲調說。外祖母愛看麻衣相書這個小故事，媽說過很多次了。

「廣州有個算命先生，」爸大聲搶着說。「我和一個朋友去找他。他指着我的朋友說他要捱餓；然後指着我，說我不用捱餓。結果真的如他所料。我來了香港，但我那朋友留在大陸，捱過饑荒、文革。我……」那個小故事，爸也說過好幾次了。

「老是講廣州的算命先生……你外祖母說的很靈驗呢。她說過幾次，有一天銀行會比米舖多。香港現在不是這樣嗎？還有……」媽拉着我說。這話她也說過好幾次了。

「根據相書，有你這樣的手，會很有福氣。」我對媽說。

「我的命也不算差了：生在富家，享過福；不過也捱過工廠。逃過難，也見過太平。幾歲時我病得連路也不會走，你外祖母天天拜神，說頭一個女兒已經養不活了，第二個女兒又病成這個樣子，難道上天註定我不該有女兒？她請過很多醫生，但都束手無策。你外祖母唯有為我準備喪事了。有一日，我迷迷糊糊的聽到有個人說，明天會有人來治好我的病，那人看來就像屋裏供奉的那個神仙像！你外祖母當我病瘋了。但第二天真的來了個牙醫，他問屋裏是不是有人病了，然後從我的牙肉拿出一塊腐爛了的骨頭。我的病幾乎立刻就好了。我家有個妹仔還在鄉下，不信去問問她。」媽說。媽對自己的出身非常自豪，很喜歡不斷地重複說她小時候的事。

「對，你是神仙！」爸語帶諷刺地說。

「不，我不是神仙，是神仙就不會來這裏，去享福了！我年幼時，常聽你外祖

母說一個故事：某地有條橋，橋上經常坐着個老人。有人問那老人為甚麼總坐在橋上，他說他在等人過橋。那人說這麼多人過橋，你看不見嗎。那老人深深嘆口氣，說那些不是人，都是冤鬼，所以才有那麼多苦難，打那麼多仗……」

「我不是冤鬼。只有你們說我壞，別人都說我好。鄉下剛來電話，問我幾時回去，等我一起去看風景呢！」爸搶着說。接着他語帶權威地說，「有時住在哪裏，也影響一個人的命數。你有個叔叔，他住的地方很多男丁早死。那種地方叫做月光地，男丁超過十五個，就會有人早死，好像月到十五就會缺一樣。後來他搬到我鄉下。現在他有幾個兒子了。我的鄉下風水好，男丁多……」

「你爸的鄉下好？又落後，蒼蠅又多，那些人一腳牛糞。我第一次去你爸的鄉下時，你的祖母叫我去擔水。我說我從來沒擔過水，不如和你爸兩人去抬吧。但你祖母說，哪有兩個人抬一桶水的事？別笑大了村裏人的口！你爸的鄉下好？我鄉下比你爸的鄉下好得多！」媽大聲批評。

「哼！你的鄉下全世界最好！」爸把頭一甩，大聲說。

「我鄉下當然好！一河兩岸，種桑養蠶，魚米之鄉。女人可以靠取絲養活自己，不用靠男人。如果不是日本仔打中國，我不會嫁給你，我會好過得多……」媽

說。

「你會好過得多！如果你少喝些酒，不要常喝醉，你也會好過得多！」爸開火了。

「我喝酒是我的事，你不高興可以去找第二個女人。你不回來我也不稀罕，二十年前你不回來我不稀罕，現在我更不介意！」媽還擊。

「還有個泰國的占卜家，她是個尼姑。」我提高嗓子說，嘗試把他們拉回神秘的世界，使他們暫時忘記爭吵。

「對，她有點佛相。」方蘇說。和我爸媽吃過幾次飯後，方蘇知道罵戰一旦上演，連觀眾也不好受。

時近中秋，月圓，但月亮已被新建的高樓擋了。後窗外青綠的山夷平了，建了有幾十幢樓的大型屋苑。

忽然我想起六十年代末、七十年代初時，星期天爸媽常請幾個妻兒在大陸的叔伯來吃飯。那些叔伯在香港都沒有家，都在狹小的店鋪後面放張床，睡在那裏。媽做菜很出色，通常星期天會做滿桌子的好菜，吃剩的菜，我們往往要吃上好幾天。晚飯時，大人們講日本軍打中國時怎樣殺小孩，饑荒時流傳的人吃人的

故事。接着他們就會講當時大陸的情況。那時我爸撿來了他的老闆棄置的舊水晶燈，在那盞華麗但已帶昏黃的燈下，大人們的面孔看來跟平日很不同，好像都變成了另外一些人。我仍記得有次伯父說鄉下的市場有豬肉賣，是鄉下自文革以來第一次有肉賣。他說後，大人們好久都沒有說話。有時，有人喝醉了，開始咒罵戰爭……客人走後，爸媽關上水晶燈，開了平日用的那支暗淡蒼白的光管，然後就開始吵，好像晚飯時談起的舊事觸動了他們的鄉愁和創傷，又好像日本軍不只炸毀了他們的家鄉，還搶走了他們快樂的根源。

幾個月前，我的幼弟和方蘇閑談時，也提到小時候很怕星期天人散後，水晶燈關上，家突然黑暗下來的一剎那，因為他知道父母又會開始吵，然後不知會怎樣收場。幼弟比我小五歲，從沒告訴過我他怕那些晚飯後的餘波。在那滿桌子剩菜的黑暗中，我下了決定，一生都不會要孩子，因為我以為，我長大後會像我爸媽一樣。

二、三十年後，美蘇的冷戰都停了，爸媽還有興致不斷重演當年那幕罵戰，劇情我早已十分厭倦，連對白也幾乎背得出來。媽會說她怎樣申請爸來港；她凌晨胎動，他怎樣不肯送她到醫院，叫她忍到天亮；她懷疑他另有女人後怎樣到工

廠做雜工，打算自己養家。跟着媽會哭起來，爸照例破口大罵，說媽常喝酒，醉了的樣子怎樣討厭。

媽相信爸另有女人後，就開始借酒消愁。我從沒有問爸這種事。回想起來，覺得媽去做工廠，也不見得不好。之前她經常在朋友家打麻將，我和姐弟好幾次要在家門外等媽回來，因為她不給我們門匙。

知道爸媽很快會盡量用尖酸的語言挖苦對方，我加上一句：「那泰國的尼姑說，我和爸的命相生，能互相帶來運氣。她建議我們一起買彩票，只要找到一個又胖又黑的女人，從她那裏買一張彩票，就會中獎。」

「真的？」爸笑起來。媽也笑了。

「我現在退休了，有空閑，不如我到那些投注站看看，找個又胖又黑的女人，找到後打電話叫你出來，一起買六合彩。」爸說。

爸和我並沒有依照那尼姑的指點買彩票。說我和爸能互相帶來運氣，簡直不可思議。我從小就不喜歡我爸，他脾氣暴躁，在家的時候，不是和媽吵架或罵我們，就把收音機開得非常噪耳，聽足球直播、賽馬直播、粵曲。星期天，他常在家打麻將，吵得我做不了功課。在麻將聲中準備考試那種感受，我現在仍清楚記

得。過去，我以為中國男人都跟爸差不多，不自覺的有點怕他們。我的舊男朋友都是外國人。

小時候，我逃避爸的方法是躲在和姐姐共用的小房間裏，埋頭看書，看教科書、舊報紙、小說。

有幾次我實在忍不住去頂撞爸。

有一次他要放掉我家那條養了十幾年的老狗。那條狗一直養在屋內，很少出外。狗病了，也許是老病了。爸要把狗帶到附近的山裏去放掉，讓它自生自滅。我一直後悔當時沒有堅持要把狗帶到獸醫那裏人道毀滅。

另一次是農曆新年。年初一吃過早飯，爸媽吵了起來。爸咒罵媽，說盡不吉利的說話，又是死，又是意外之類。如果他的孩子對他說這樣的話，實在不知道會有甚麼後果。媽哭起來。她睡了後，我懷着恨意對爸說：「大年初一你不該對媽說這些話。」

在爸媽的薰陶下，我很迷信，認為新年不能亂說不吉利的話。

幾年前在紐約，我跟一個研究星相學的朋友去算命。那是我第一次找算命先生。那位先生差不多九十歲，在華人社區很有名氣。他聲稱算過八萬多個人的

命。

「你的父母都很麻煩。」那算命先生說。

聽爸媽吵，就像回到童年那些黑暗的日子。好好對待爸媽，又覺得背叛了年幼時的自己，因為我認為以往爸媽刻意抑壓我。每次見完爸媽後，我總覺得很苦惱，很為難，不斷向方蘇發脾氣。我們的關係愈來愈差，方蘇終於搬離我住的小室，回到他九龍的小蝸居。

幾個月後，方蘇才承認他對我爸媽好，是心理上對他母親的補償。

「我不能對我父母做些甚麼，只有對你爸媽好一點，算是對自己良心的交待。」他說。

方蘇的父親去世一年後，他的母親從美國回來，趕在清明節前到大陸去掃墓。在方蘇的札記中，他對他母親這次「擾攘」有以下的描述。

一九九九年二月十九日

媽要回港一趟，難免會有一番擾攘。

估計她起碼會在香港住兩個星期，期間要到大陸去。老父去世快一周年，媽要回去拜山（掃墓）。她不開口我也要陪她跑一趟，去老父的鄉下。

我對廣州並無好感，那裏的家人我已覺得頗為生疏。去年我跑了兩趟廣州，僅有的收穫就是那張描老父面容的速寫。

媽一九五七年離開廣州，在香港住到八七年，之後移民美國。她去了十年，

只回過香港和廣州一次。上一次她回來，我還在《九十年代》做編輯。她說我只顧勞碌，不會為自己打算。她叫我移民美國，我不置可否。我知她擔心九七，當時我也不能說自己並不擔心。到頭來我還是留在香港。

現在我已不再搞雜誌，希望能靠畫畫過日子。但這絕不容易。未來一段日子，我會毫無收入。這段日子也許會持續好幾年。媽肯定會不高興。她一定會嘮嘮叨叨。

一九九九年三月十七日

媽今天一早駕到。我五點四十五分起床，到機場接機。

她飛了十四個鐘頭，看來竟毫無倦容；踏進家門，第一件事就是抓起電話，找那幫姨媽。她不斷打電話，講了半個鐘頭，約好了見面的時間。我則在一旁替她打點行李。之後她要我送她過海，到賣米姨媽那裏去。到了那裏，四個人蹤頭，三個是同村長大的。

有一個姨媽的兒子在附近做事。他做東，請一眾姨媽上茶樓吃午飯。下午，

這個四人幫去購物，我不用隨行，可以去看黑楊，在她那裏畫花。

我下午六點才回家，媽比我還晚一小時。她說煮飯已經太晚了，我和她出去吃了點東西。吃完回來，她終於說睏了，洗個澡，去睡覺，已是差不多十點了。她睡了，我才寫札記。

她睡覺前才說，和一眾姨媽去買東西，買了二千塊，她帶的現金不夠，姨媽給她墊付。她要我明天再帶她到賣米姨媽那裏，她要還錢，還要打一天麻將。

一九九九年三月十八日

今天一早，我就把媽送到賣米姨媽那裏。她打她的麻將，我趁機脫身，到黑楊那裏畫花。這幾天特別潮濕，到處濕濕滑滑。爬了幾層濕滑的樓梯，到了黑楊的小室，也是一片水氣。這種天氣不宜畫水墨，於是我一連三天都是用鉛筆或蠟筆，畫馬蹄蘭。

天氣潮濕，花長得特別好。三天前買的兩束馬蹄蘭，開得雍容華貴。我描了兩張速寫，漸漸覺得更能掌握馬蹄蘭的生長形態，相信畫水墨時可以畫得更好。

傍晚，我下樓到正街去餵那兩隻街貓，然後又到休憩處看狗。那些狗主已經來了，帶着不同品種的寵物，把那小片地方弄得像開狗展。上個星期，我夢見他們的狗展，夢見一張狗展的照片自動漸變成一張水墨畫。

我想畫一張狗展，畫中的狗主樣子要像他們養的寵物。那個休憩處有個狗主，圓圓胖胖，很健談。他說，人養的狗，樣子往往就像主人。我倒覺得，養狗的人，樣子往往就像自己養的狗。我已經畫了駝背婆婆餵貓。總有一天，我要畫那裏的狗展。

一九九九年三月十九日

今天，我又一次送媽到那幫姨媽那裏，然後溜到黑楊的小室去畫花。馬蹄蘭開得很好，我今天做的畫稿也比昨天好。着色時，我加了些光影，畫面看來有點幽幽的感覺。這張稿應該可以畫成水墨。

昨天我把一張畫稿帶回九龍，今天早上着色。我一邊着色，一邊要準備媽講完電話去吃早點。可是她和那些姨媽說個不休，電話一個接一個。結果我那張畫

稿沒弄好光影。中國畫往往忽略了光影，倘若我有辦法處理好光影，我的畫會跟傳統的水墨很不一樣。我畫的「街貓」已加上了光影，今後的畫也應多注意光影。

今天在黑楊那裏只有幾小時，只夠做一張着色的畫稿。五點半，我和黑楊去接媽，帶她到一家很有名的菜館，吃了頓好的。飯後我們又帶她到一間酒店的廳堂吃果點，那是我和黑楊在週末去得最多的地方。我們在那裏坐到午夜才離開。

一九九九年三月二十一日

明天就要和媽上廣州。其實她要去的地方是我老父在開平的鄉下。她說要到我老父和我祖母墳前拜祭一番。

祖母一九五八年在廣州去世，死後葬在廣州。六十年代末或七十年代初，廣州市政府把墳地清除了，改建住宅，祖母的骸骨也就移葬回鄉。老父去世一個月之後，遺骨同樣回鄉下葬。

鄉下我沒去過。我在廣州出生，十一歲到香港，對所謂的鄉下一無所知。我

跟媽說，我不喜歡廣州，更不喜歡去甚麼鄉下。

「我也不喜歡，」媽說。「如果你爸不葬在那裏，我也不會去。」

她打算在廣州僱輛車，回鄉一趟。

「我才不會在那地方過夜，」她說。「我們當天就返回廣州，即日來回。」

她收拾行李，都是從美國帶回來的手信。

我跟她說，回鄉之後，還可以北上，去杭州看看風景。她很勉強地說，如果黑楊同行，不妨到杭州看一看。

「這次我會順道買點紙筆，」我說，「在廣州買，或者在杭州買。」

一九九九年三月二十二日

直通巴士開早上八時四十五分，午後一時到廣州。

我先到廣州大廈訂了個房間。那大廈是一座新落成的酒店，就在我童年時住的老家附近。老家本來是間平房，八十年代初重建，拆掉平房，蓋了座三層半的屋子，出力的是老父和我同父異母的哥哥，我只是出點錢。過去，屋子名義上屬

媽所有，因為按中共政權當年的政策，海外僑胞和港澳同胞的所謂僑產不予沒收，所以廣州的老家得以保留。如今，屋子是我哥哥名下的物業，他人在美國。住那屋子的人，是我那異母哥哥和他的妻兒，還有他的媽媽，亦即我另一個母親。

屋子重建了還不到二十年，但狀況並不好。尤其是那條樓梯，對老人家來說，難保上落平安。因此，我堅持要媽住酒店。她脊骨有點毛病，壓着腿神經。還有，倘若我和媽回老家住，即使短短幾天，我那異母哥哥大概也會覺得不很舒暢。

今天天氣轉冷，日間溫度約攝氏十三至十五度，晚間會再往下降。天氣報告說未來幾天持續陰冷。媽反對北上杭州，看來此行的尾聲就是明天回鄉拜山。

一九九九年三月二十三日

我們僱了一輛八坐位的麵包車，清早出發，到在開平的那個所謂鄉下去。一行六人，除了媽和我，還有異母哥哥，他的妻子，他的兒子，以及他媽媽。

車開了四個鐘頭，才到赤水鎮，離老父的村莊還有一小段路。車停在異母哥哥一個舅舅的屋前。那舅舅已早有準備。他訂了一隻燒豬、一隻燒鵝，還有香燭冥鏹，諸如此類。那些東西在「新社會」曾經一度絕跡，如今又再成為風尚。屋前另有一輛農夫車，載着四個人，說是鄉裏臨時請來幫人拜山的幫工。老父世居大宅村，離赤水鎮二三公里。我們先到祖屋，然後再去上墳。

首先去拜祭老父。他葬在一個小山坡上，墳墓向着一條路，路那邊是個池塘，墳前立了塊小墓碑，刻了「二十三世祖方公奕邦」等字樣。幾米之外的斜坡高處，葬了一個祖先。因為不知先人名字，那個墓沒有碑石，大家胡里胡塗地拜祭一番。

那些幫工清除了墳上的雜草，供上燒豬、燒鵝等祭品，跟着幫忙點香燭，燒冥鏹。我沒怎樣碰過那類東西，大部分時間只是做看客。忙亂了一陣，幫工開刀切燒豬、燒鵝。鄉間有些人路過，站着看熱鬧。鄉裏人說這些人來「望山」，有人望山是好事，要分一兩片肉給每個人嚐嚐。

另一處墓地在一個小山的高坡上，同樣沒有墓碑，沒有人知道是哪一代的祖先。到了那裏，大家又依樣忙亂一番。

再下來就到村後二百米的一處墓地，祖父母、曾祖父母和高曾祖父母都葬在那裏。墓碑署的年份全是一九九三年，顯然是老父立的。碑上刻着二十、二十一、二十二世祖等字樣。

掃完墓，一干人等又回到祖屋去。村名叫大宅，村裏幾乎全是老舊的小屋。來了一些父老，來吃一兩塊肉，也表示一下親善。一個老人家對我說，最好是重修祖屋，以後再回鄉也有個地方「坐一下」。

我那另一個母親隨即附和。她剛才在路上就說要重建祖屋，從廣州一直說到大宅。她原籍開平，曾在那間老屋居住多年。一九五七年我媽到香港謀生，鄉下這個媽媽五八年搬到廣州。這次她回到鄉下，顯得特別活躍。只見她唸唸有詞，說這說那，說酒不是這樣奠的，祖先應該怎樣拜。

「我一直叫他們重修祖屋，」她說，「講了很多年，但他們甚麼也不做。」

「誰會回來住？」我問異母哥哥，其實也是問他媽媽。

「沒有人回來住，」異母哥哥說，「我們只不過每年回來兩次。」

「這是祖屋，快要塌了，你們就是不理！」她忿忿地直嚷，「你們沒心肝！全都沒心肝！」

「好了，好了！」她兒子厭煩了。「我不想現在跟你爭吵。」

她還不住口，依然嘮嘮叨叨。

我撇下他們，轉過頭去問那老人家：「怎麼村子空蕩蕩的，很多房子沒有人住？」

「對呀！」他答道，「很多人到城裏去，有的到外國去了。」他舉了一些例子，提到一些人，但那些人的名字我從未聽過。

「我本來住廣州，在廣州工作。」他說，「幾年前退休，才回到鄉下。」

我點點頭，表示理解，再指着燒豬，請他自便。

我們下午五時之前離開大宅村，回到廣州已是晚上九時，書畫用品商店已經關了門。

一九九九年三月二十四日

今天離開廣州，早上先招呼廣州的家人吃了趟早茶，然後到書畫用品商店去買宣紙。我直率地對媽和異母哥哥說，為活着的人做點事，比拜祭死了的人更有

意義。

六尺宣紙我買了六卷，四尺的買了三卷。九卷紙看起來一大堆，媽見了就怕。我那哥哥也有點驚愕，但卻不哼一聲。

巴士開一時四十分。提着大綑宣紙登車，我看得出媽不大高興。她說東西太笨重，又說畫畫難，要做畫家更難。我說下了決心，要試一試，過去沒有機會，現在才有。

「我不明白。」她說，「這是你自己的事，我無能為力，況且我也老了。」

「對，這是我自己的事。」我說，「我自己可以應付。你只需要自己保重。跑完這一趟，最好以後不再去廣州，也不要再到那所謂鄉下去。去那些地方對你沒有益處。」

「這次你說得對。」她答道，「下一次去大陸，我會跟旅行團去北京。」

一九九九年三月二十八日

媽回來之後，我沒法畫畫，甚至睡也睡不好。我把睡房讓給她，自己在客廳

打地鋪，那個客廳已改成了畫室。

她下腰尾椎有毛病，走路會腳痛。她在這裏，我不能不格外留神。就算她跟那幫姨媽出去，我也處於候命狀態，要隨傳隨到。

她哪天要到姨媽那裏打麻將，我就帶她去，然後才能脫身。等她來個電話，我又要去接她。前天，她跟一個姨媽去大嶼山拜佛，我不用去。我一早把她送到會合的地方，以為有一整天可以做自己的事。想不到她午後就回家，打我的流動電話找我。那天我的畫稿只做了一半。

昨天，黑楊過來陪了我媽一天。上午，我們帶媽到玉器市場，給她買個玉戒指。買完東西，我們聊了一個下午，跟着過海到港島吃晚飯，飯後到黑楊的小室去。之後，我對黑楊歉意地說，她花了太多時間陪我媽。我覺得自己應該多照顧媽，但看着黑楊也花那麼多時間陪着她，實在過意不去。

一九九九年三月三十日

今天下午送媽到機場，完成了任務。

這趟她回來，我帶她去看了不少她以前常去的地方。她去了黃大仙廟，去了九龍城、深水埗、尖沙嘴、佐敦等地，買了不少東西。看她買東西，我不得不提醒她，行李已經太重了。

我替她收拾行李，滿滿的一大箱。

我們召了一輛的士，我跟司機說要到九龍站轉乘機場快線列車。

「我可以載你們到機場去，」司機說，「你只需要多付三幾十塊錢。你會計數，知道要花多少錢：從這裏到機鐵站要三十塊，兩個人坐機鐵要百多塊。你給我一百八十塊，我載你直達機場。」

「好呀！」我說，「我媽媽還未見過青馬大橋。」再問司機：「為甚麼會有這種優惠？」

「生意不好。」他答道，「我駕着車轉了四十五分鐘，兜不到搭客。我正想到機場去等客。」

「在機場等客要等多久？」我問他。

「說不定，大概三個鐘頭。」他說，「等客時，我可以在那裏吃飯。反正要吃飯，吃飯用一個鐘頭。這樣計算，等客其實不夠兩個鐘頭。只要有客，我可以賺

回二百多塊。算它二百五十，仍很值得。如果在市區打轉，可能再過四十五分鐘也沒有客。你知道啦，現在經濟不景，人人都少花錢，盡量少坐的士。」

車到機場只需要三十五分鐘。我給司機二百塊，連行李費，他有點喜出望外。

一九九九年三月三十一日

哥哥來了個長途電話，說媽已經到了。

「她看來很好。」哥哥說，「行李不用檢查，順利過關。」

「可能是因為我替她辦登機時說她拿不動行李，抵達時需要協助。」我說，「其實，何必讓她跑這一趟呢？你說，讓她到你老父鄉下拜山有沒有必要？回香港替美國的親友購物有沒有必要？」

「沒有辦法。她認識那些人，接了他們的訂單。」哥哥說，「我沒叫她買東西。我只是讓她回鄉一行。你要明白，她非去不可，至少去一次。我會叫她以後不要再去；如果再去，我們和她一起去。」

「不，這對她沒有益處，對你也沒有益處。」我打斷他，「何不讓廣州那些人清靜一下。他們見到你不會高興，你見到他們也不會高興。」

回想媽在香港的兩個多星期，我自己也覺得很矛盾。我照顧她，讓她在這裏過得舒服一點。可是，我又不想她花我太多時間。別人看她，覺得她很隨和，其實她很頑固，也很煩躁。她在家裏，我做不了甚麼，畫更不能畫。她總是打電話，講個不停。我把客廳改成畫室，她很不滿意，說連沙發也沒有了。

「我們本來有兩個臥室，」她說。

「對，但現在只有一個，我要地方畫畫。」我說，「這裏做畫室仍然太小，要找個更大的地方。」

「這個地方你打算怎樣處理？」她問。

「賣掉，或者出租。」我答。

「我再回來住甚麼地方？」

「我不知道，但到時自有安排。」我說，「你下一次回來，要謝絕所有訂單。一天到晚買東西，太累了；行李太重，你拿不動。還有，老實說，你在這裏我無法畫畫。我不是說你不受歡迎，只不過你在這裏我無法畫畫。」

「這麼說，我還可以回來。」她嘆了一口氣，「你知道，在香港不像在美國那麼死氣沉沉。在美國，我整天困在家裏。在香港，我可以和那些姨媽到處去。不過，我回來也不會久留。這次我只住了兩個星期。我在美國要領福利金，每次離境不能超過三十天。」

「你下一次最好跟旅行團去北京或者上海。」我說，「留在香港的時間愈少愈好，免得你老是替別人買東西。」

「好，我下次會北上。」她說，「你呢？你今年去不去美國？」

「不去，」我說，「未來兩年不會去，有可能幾年內都不會去。」

「為甚麼？」

「我要畫畫，我想開個畫展。」我說，「還有，我想過自己的生活。」

「上一次你媽去廣州看你父親，是哪一年的事？」我問方蘇。

「大概九四年吧。她移民去美國前也很少到廣州看他。」

「既然你父親在世時她也不去看看他，何必長途跋涉去拜山？」

「不知道。見面時你去問問她。」

見面時，我當然沒有問她。有些話我很難跟長輩說，好像一旦面對長輩，那些話就躲了起來。可能自己小時候與長輩說話時常被指為駁嘴，慢慢形成自我審查的傾向。

方蘇的母親看來也像其他長輩般拘束。他父親去世後幾個月，我在美國見過她。那次，方蘇帶了大包小包先啟程，行李內有海味乾貨、茶葉、中藥……好像他要去的不是美國某大城市，而是大陸某窮村莊。幾天後，我才照他的指示輕身上路。

4

長途機後，我和方蘇的母親打過招呼，就去睡。

睡不了幾小時，方蘇拍醒我，說他母親叫我去唐人街買點元貝之類的禮物給他的哥哥嫂嫂弟弟弟婦，充當香港帶來的手信。他知道我出發前病倒，而且一直因工作關係長期睡眠不足，但仍堅持要我依照她的意思辦事。方蘇哥哥住的地方離唐人街有一個多小時的車程，先要坐班次很疏的公共汽車，再坐火車。回程時，我已在夢遊狀態。但接下來的兩個多小時，我仍得坐在桌前，竭力陪其他人吃吃、談談，像演鬧劇一樣。

「要住旅店，這裏我應付不了。」飯後我對方蘇說。

「媽會不高興，每次我來都住這裏，我又是第一次帶女朋友來。」

不住旅館的代價實在高昂，那一兩個星期，為了要迎合方蘇的母親和哥哥的生活節奏，我和方蘇都很煩躁，每天都會為一些小事吵起來。在我的印象中，時間不是花在吃飯上，就是花在等着上館子上。

那次旅程給我一個教訓：方蘇和他母親、哥哥在一起時，智力就倒退，他們說甚麼，他就做甚麼，像個小孩子一樣。

所以，聽到方蘇的母親要回來，我立定主意，雖然回鄉拜山聽來是寫作的好

題材，但我不打算隨行，以免方蘇要同時扮演成人和小孩兩個角色。此外，我會把她當做一個旅途上蹤到的忘年之交，耐心去聽她講故事。她實在也見證了我到現在仍搞不清楚的中國近代史。她也像很多上一代的女人一樣有本事：五十年代她到香港；六二年她辦妥申請，接方蘇和他哥哥來香港。除了要負擔兩個兒子的生活費，她還要寄錢到廣州，因為她的第三個兒子仍在廣州，與她的丈夫、丈夫的第一個妻子及她的兒子同住。

啟程來香港前幾天，方蘇的母親因血壓不穩定入院，令我想到，她已經七十三歲，人生無常，也不必告訴她我和方蘇已由戀人冷卻成為朋友。

有一件事她要在香港做：買一隻玉戒指。她本來戴着的斷開了，她認為要再買一隻，最好在香港買，因為這裏的玉石比美國的好。我聽過很多關於玉石的傳奇，對玉很好奇。方蘇講過好幾次選擇玉石的要訣，他說他的舅父，也就是他母親的哥哥，曾在緬甸經營玉石，來到香港後常講怎樣看玉石的色澤和紋彩。不過他總補上一句：他那位舅父吹牛比選玉石還要棒。

「舅父常說他收藏了很多上好的玉石，都埋藏在緬甸一個秘密的地方。」方蘇說過一次又一次，幾乎使我有尋寶的念頭。「他離開緬甸時不能帶出境，因為海關

會把玉石沒收。他說總有一天，他會回去取他的玉石，還說玉石有靈，會等他。不過緬甸未歡迎他回去，他就去世了。他又說，以前緬北山區有馬幫，會替人把玉石偷運到泰國去賣。」

和方蘇的母親逛了好幾家玉器商店，都找不到合意的戒指。聽人說上好的玉石能令主人逢凶化吉，所以雖然方蘇和我都沒有戴玉的習慣，但已預算最少花幾千塊錢，買一隻好些的玉戒指。又聽說緬甸的玉特別有靈，我們積極找緬甸玉。

「只要是一隻玉造的戒指，就夠好了，用不着花一千幾百。花一百塊買一隻就夠了。」她說。

於是我們去九龍的玉器市場。以前我從沒去過，想不到竟是個頗有味道的市集。有蓋的市場外有幾個衣着像少數民族的老人，拿着大塊的玉石，跟一羣圍觀者討論。市場內的攤檔多賣廉價玉器。有些檔主說，他們賣的是古玉，見證中國改朝換代。他們不介意花時間拿出特別的收藏品，供顧客欣賞。

「你拿着慢慢看，」一個攤檔的主人說，「我賣的都是真玉，沒有人工加色，不像其他地方那樣拿塑膠充玉石。」

把玉石捧在手裏，有幾塊涼透手心，怪怪的。

她終於找到一隻合意的玉戒，幾百塊錢，她嫌貴，雖然付錢的是方蘇。我們大力游說她買，免得我們再要陪她四處尋尋覓覓。買完戒指後，她繼續在市場流連，說想買些手信。我熱烈參與講價，希望她一口氣買完手信，不用到處張羅，也就是不用再陪她逛街購物。最後她買了差不多十對玉耳環。我從來沒有像那天講價講得那般起勁。

「玉是很好的手信，她們去參加派對時都喜歡戴耳環，」她說。她的手信是給她大兒媳一家人的。方蘇的嫂嫂是緬甸華人，緬甸排華後移居美國。

回到方蘇的小蝸居後，我問他的母親：「你大哥以前做甚麼？」

她看來很輕鬆，好像完成了艱巨的任務。當時已近黃昏，春日迷濛的斜影夾着陣陣寒風透窗而入，映得我們吃着那些熟透了的杧果更充滿陽光氣息，室內暖意更濃。杧果是方蘇母親最喜愛的水果。

「他去緬甸前，在廣州開過麵店，他做的雲吞很好吃，」她說。「我常在那裏吃麵。三十年代他到緬甸去了。緬甸排華時，我四處奔走，花了很多錢，才把他弄出來。後來他取得難民身份，去了澳門。我去澳門看他，對他說：你差不多花光父親剩下的錢了。」

「第二次世界大戰時，他在盟軍空軍的飛虎隊當廚師，」方蘇說。他實在喜歡講他舅父。「他對吃很有研究，愛入廚，每次他入廚我都當他的助手。他最愛煮大的東西。有次他想煮隻大水魚，但那水魚實在太大了，結果他買了半隻。他連切薑的方法都很講究。他說，拍扁、切絲、切片、切碎，每種方法都能帶出食物的不同風味。」他轉身對他媽說：「媽，我做菜做得比你好。」

「當然啦！我根本不下廚。我婆婆甚麼都替我做，服侍得我很好。只是有一次，她不肯替我殺雞。那是年三十晚，她嫌我買的雞太小，說吃團年飯不該買那麼小的雞。我拿着雞，不知該怎辦。我從來沒殺過雞，哈哈……」

「我會殺雞，」方蘇說。他告訴過我，他年少時，每天做好飯等母親放工回來吃。

「我從來沒有學過做菜。結婚前，我上學，下課後就和同村的女伴打天九，常常打通宵。我父親在加拿大，有錢寄回來給我們。如果不是日本仔打中國，我就不會逃難，也就不會踫上方蘇的父親……日本仔！我婆婆待我很好，只要我每次上街都帶點吃的回去給她，她就很高興。我二哥在廣州開雪糕店，有次我去探望他，看見他有杧果。我婆婆很愛吃杧果，但當時這種水果很難買得到，不好意思

開口問二哥要。於是我讚杧果新鮮。他當然明白，叫我拿一個回家。我把杧果給婆婆時她開心得不得了，現在我還記得她那時的神情。」

方蘇的祖母為甚麼待他母親那般好，似乎不難理解：她生了三個兒子。方蘇的父親是第三代的獨子，是所謂三代單傳，他的第一個妻子生了一男一女。

「今晚想到哪裏吃飯？」我問方蘇的母親。在美國和她吃過幾次飯，知道她對吃的要求很高，一旦不合她的口味，她會一臉不高興。

「在香港，甚麼酒樓餐廳都好。在美國，想買一隻活着的走地雞也買不到。魚也不好吃，不是銀鱈魚、三文魚就是貓魚（鮭魚），完全沒有味道。」她說。

「香港現在有很多日本餐館，吃日本菜怎樣？」我問。我和方蘇都很喜歡吃日本壽司。

「不好不好，不吃日本菜！我不喜歡日本仔！也不喜歡他們的菜！吃過一次了，碗是黑色的，怪！」她竭力否決，然後又重複她已經說過的話：「如果不是日本仔打中國，我就會像二哥一樣，去上海讀書。」說完她對方蘇說：「唉！香港真好！在美國，想吃一隻這樣好的呂宋杧或者泰國腰杧都不可能。」

「你在美國開心嗎？」我問她。

「不，開心就談不上了！不錯，每個星期天都有人陪我打麻將。但真的不能說開心。我移民去美國，都是為了要替方蘇的弟弟辦申請，使他可以走出大陸。」

在美國，她與長子同住。她住樓下，房間外是車房和雜物，房間內氣氛沉鬱，好像是被人遺忘了的空間，與樓上堆滿摩登擺設的客廳比，儼然兩個世界。她替幼子照顧兩個小孩。去美國探她時，我曾對方蘇的哥哥說過，不應讓她那樣辛勞。

「那個一歲的真重，但你媽總忍不住要抱他，這對她的腰骨不好，」我說。

「那三歲的更麻煩，她每一刻都在吵。你怎能叫一個七十三歲的人看管他們？」方蘇顯然不安。

「媽欠了我們的弟弟，」方蘇的哥哥淡淡地說。「他在廣州呆了三十多年，捱了那麼久，才走得出來。媽應該幫他照顧那兩個小孩。」

後來她因為血壓不穩定入院，才停止當褓姆。

「你在香港開心嗎？」吃完杧果後，我問她。

「開心，」她很肯定地說。

「現在方蘇的弟弟已經去美國了，你可以回來住。」我說。

「不，我不會回來住。美國的醫療比這裏的好得多。對上了年紀的人，這實在很重要。在美國，我要看醫生，打個電話預約就可以了。在香港我要在公立醫院門外排隊……」她說。

一個長途電話打斷了我們的談話：方蘇的哥哥從美國打電話來。

「他說有個姨媽叫你替她到深水埗北河街買一種陳皮梅，那姨媽最喜歡吃那種口果，要兩包……」方蘇說完，轉向電話筒說：「你媽的行李還不夠重嗎？她已經不再是二十歲了。」

「他們就是這樣，」方蘇掛上電話後，他母親說。「在美國，我不用靠人，政府有福利金給我。香港的老人家就要靠下一輩養了。」

和她談話，我發覺她不像我爸媽般缺乏安全感，大概她移民到美國後慢慢培養了安全感。在香港時，方蘇住的小蝸居仍歸她名下，她移民到美國後好幾年，才把物業轉到方蘇名下。那個小蝸居約四百平方呎，本來是她買給大兒子結婚後住的。她選址，方蘇出了部分的錢，買的時候窗外還沒有興建那條巨大的高速行車天橋。第一次去方蘇的家時，我給那惡劣的居住環境嚇了一跳。我問他為甚麼不搬到一個較安寧的地方。

「我不能賣這地方，因為業權不屬於我；也不能另租一個地方，因我的入息不高，要寄錢到廣州給老父，又要寄錢給美國的哥哥和弟弟買他們的房子。現在，我已經買斷了和家人的關係，我把自己買回來了。」他說完後又補充，他以為一生都不會與一個女人有關係，因為他沒有經濟能力負擔一個家庭。

我和他開始認真交往時，他的入息只是我的三分之二，雖然大家都從事新聞工作，他又比我多十年工作經驗。《九十年代》月刊並非完全以賺錢為目的，這也是他一直不離開那本雜誌的原因，雖然曾經有高薪的職位等着他。他母親移民到美國時，他三十六歲。如果她留在香港，大概他會繼續獨身。更重要的是，他永不會嘗試專心畫畫。

晚飯後，我們到一家大酒店的咖啡座。方蘇的母親看見一羣穿黑衣的年輕人，說：「為甚麼香港每樣東西都是黑色的，好像整個地方都死氣沉沉，又好像人人都要去參加喪禮。美國不是這樣的。」

她要求與我的爸媽見面。他們一起喝早茶，吃點心。

喝完茶後，她很困惑地問：「你爸媽為甚麼吵個不停？真奇怪！一個未講完，另一個就立刻說：不對，那是錯的。」

「他們一向都是這樣，」我說。「小時候，我做甚麼都不對。就算是考試得到好成績，得到的反應也是：不過是海上無魚蝦為大罷了。看看你那叔叔伯伯的孩子，他們才算好！」

「我不喜歡吵鬧，」她說。「方蘇的父親一發脾氣，我就不作聲，他想吵也吵不成了。」

「這樣會不會愈說愈少，最後你們會沒話可說？」

「對，後來的確變成那樣了。」

方蘇承繼了他母親那種特質，每次我發脾氣，他就不作聲。他總是坐在那裏，我吵，像我媽一樣。我唸尖刻的獨白時，他的臉色會轉黑，那黑色往往會留在他臉上超過二十四小時。有次我細心地觀看了他的臉後，忍不住笑了起來。此後，每次我發脾氣，我就叫他「黑面貓」。我吵得愈多，他說得愈少。漸漸，我們之間也很少話可說了。

「為甚麼你不說話？我寧願你罵我，也不要你不作聲，」我對他說。

「我習慣了控制自己。小時候，父親一發脾氣，就無理的亂罵人亂打小孩。我對自己說過，要盡量不向人發脾氣，現在想改也改不了。」他臉黑黑的說。

方蘇的母親回美國後，我細想她告訴過我的故事。那些令她難忘的片段，我聽來並不感動。沒有經歷過那個時代，實在無法了解他們的感受和反應。我想到，如果我要寫，就應寫我自己的經歷。

於是我放下寫了好幾個月但仍毫無頭緒的小說，開始把一些自己的經歷改成短篇。

對，他們的過去屬於他們，不屬於我。

5

方蘇回鄉拜山後，把他鄉下的情況說得很動聽，使我不禁嘆息錯過了寫作的好題材。所以我爸說鄉下祠堂大修後重開，問我是否有興趣去湊熱鬧時，我再也抵受不了誘惑。

當時我剛寫完了二十個短篇故事，其中只有兩個以香港為背景。對我來說，寫香港人的故事，似乎比寫外國人還要難。

「和你爸媽一起去，你可能受不了。」方蘇對我說。

「有心理準備，不會太壞吧。」我說。可是情況遠比我想像的壞。

午後，祠堂前就開始有醒獅。打鼓的是個老人，打得很吃力的樣子。幾十個人默默地看醒獅，彷彿給鼓聲催眠了，又好像沒有力氣說話。他們大都是老人和小孩，都沒有穿喜慶日子的鮮明衣裳，看來就跟滿地的大紅炮竹碎屑不大協調了。那是農曆十二月，東北季候風把氣溫拉低到攝氏十度左右。但那天回暖，陽

光透過雲層，在老人們滿是風霜的臉上抹上金色。

鑼鼓聲中，有人說坐在我身後的是我大伯娘。大伯娘對我說：「你大伯父捱不過年了。」

過了好一會，才記起大伯父的樣子。他總是穿一身有四個大口袋的唐裝衫褲，腳踏俗稱伯父鞋的中式布鞋，不像其他叔伯般西式打扮。他和我爸同父異母，以往總來我家拜年。通常他和爸媽說幾句話，就默默地坐着，最後邁着孤寂的腳步慢慢離去，像一個沒有家的旅人。以前他在香港住，妻兒在大陸。退休後，他負擔不起香港高昂的生活費，搬回鄉下。

舞獅告一段落後，見到我爸媽，我建議回程時去看大伯父。

「不去，沒有帶手信。」爸說。

「可以先回家拿手信，反正路不遠。」我說。爸在鄉下有間小屋，我們就住在那裏。

「不，行李還未拆開。」爸說。他帶了五十多公斤的手信。那天我曾因為手信的問題與他爭執。我的行李很簡單，但我要照顧我媽和拿一袋手信，還要拿他在直通車免稅店買的幾支法國拔蘭地和幾條香煙。

「現在大陸甚麼都可以買到，為甚麼還要搬這麼多東西？簡直像逃難一樣！」廣州火車站的海關人龍很長，檢查進度十分緩慢，空氣也不好。排隊時，我終於忍不住發脾氣。

「我怎能空手返鄉下？如果我沒有錢買手信給親戚，不如不返！」爸大聲說。

「如果你的兄弟姊妹真的想見你，他們不會介意你有沒有手信，也不會介意你有沒有錢買東西給他們。」我壓低了聲音，其他排隊等候過關的人都轉過頭來看我們。

「這個世界甚麼都是講錢！沒錢沒朋友！沒親戚！沒鄉下！」爸大聲說。近兩年他的聽覺漸差，說話的聲量也漸大。

「和他說這些話，完全沒有用！他對鄉下死心塌地，他又愛面子。嫁他的時候，已經是那樣，有甚麼好東西就帶回鄉下，不會想想妻兒。」媽打斷爸的話。

「我早就說不回來了……」

「甚麼是港澳同胞？」我九歲大的姪兒指着海關一個牌子問。

「港澳同胞就是……」爸柔聲對他的孫兒說。

爸有了孫兒後，就像變了另一個人。當時我在歐洲，無法目睹他那改變的過

程。我回到香港後，他的確不再像以往般難親近，他心情好的時候，大家還可以談上幾句。

火車站的行人電梯壞了，爸要把那包比他的體型還大的行李搬下百多級樓梯。

「不用你幫我！」我嘗試去幫他，他大聲叫道。

他把行李綑在一輛小鐵拉車上，掙扎着下樓梯，每下一級，就停一會，努力站穩腳步。兩三年前，我和他一起走下也有百多級梯階的行人天橋時，他站不穩腳，跌到二十多級石階下。他傷得雖輕，但嚇壞了我。

爸咬緊嘴唇，流着汗，臉上的肌肉抽動着，就像他以前打孩子時的模樣。

七十歲的爸，穿着簇新的英國名牌外套，一級一級的走，終於把行李拖到樓梯腳。他每次回鄉，都穿得非常光鮮講究。

媽緊拉着我的手臂，緩慢困難地下樓梯，走幾級就停一停，好像要貯備足夠信心才能再開步走。她的手很冷，我感覺到她嶙峋的骨節。她說每次上大陸，都會想起六十年代中國鬧饑荒時，她用擔竿擔米糧衣物用品，給她在廣州的弟弟和我爸在鄉下的母親和兄弟姊妹。她還說，每次過深圳的海關，關員就把她的行李

翻來覆去檢查，又不斷盤問她，弄得她惶恐萬分。

「明天再去看大伯父吧。天黑了，他大概已經睡了。不如到我家喝杯茶吧。」我姑姑說。

路上，姑姑和姑丈繼續討論外嫁女可否參加慶祝祠堂重開的酒宴。我姑姑想去，又聽到外嫁女付二百元人民幣就可以出席酒宴，於是想付款去一趟。但姑丈卻叫她別想。

「我跟她說，如果你只肯付二百元，就別去了。要去，就付二千元。」姑丈說。那番話他早已向我們說了一遍。二百元是大陸很多工人差不多半個月的工資。

「別理那些人。我會去，他們歡迎我也好，不歡迎我也好。」我說。

「你還未結婚，還是楊家人。」姑姑說。

「你是香港來的，受特殊待遇。」姑丈說。後來他告訴我，他與我姑姑的婚事，祖父曾經阻止，原因是他出身窮困，而楊家在村中是大姓。後來共產黨當權，村中貧農得勢，他才娶得到我姑姑。

「這就簡單了，你就和我們同坐一桌就行了。」我說。我爸用他和兩個弟弟的

名義捐了錢修建祠堂，我爸大概會有一桌。捐款者除了可參加酒宴外，名字還會刻在祠堂的牆上。出發前，爸幾次批評負責修建祠堂的鄉親沒有通知他捐錢，使他差點失去名字永留在祠堂的良機。

「她是外嫁女，按規矩不能去吃酒宴。」我姑丈繼續說。「附近一條村也有同樣的問題。有個外嫁女捐了二十萬元修建祠堂，她是香港來的，捐的款最大筆，但也不能吃酒宴。他們計算過，如果讓外嫁女出席，酒宴就得擺三天三夜，才能招呼所有人。」

「但我們這條村，是女兒比兒子有本事。」爸這樣說。不過回鄉前，爸一直說自己有福氣，得了男孫，要回鄉祭祖。事實上，如果我不是他幾個孩子當中唯一上過大學的，讓他有點面子，我想他未必叫我回鄉。他從沒有積極鼓勵他的孩子讀書或者受高深教育。他常對孩子說的話是：有便宜就不要硬頸。我從沒有認真思考那句話的意義，只是有時我真覺得他醉心金錢，就像我醉心寫作一樣。我們的共通點是大家都不善於得到醉心夢想的東西。

到姑姑家後，媽又開始數說爸鄉下的不是。「你媽最不喜歡我，」媽說，「這裏的人都不喜歡我。有次我去一個親戚家坐，她連茶也不給我倒一杯！」

「還記着這些事做甚麼？」姑姑說。「喝杯茶。」

「為甚麼不記？怎忘得了？這裏的人個個都對我不好！」媽說。

姑姑不再跟我媽說話。她給我一杯茶，對我說，「你媽老記着以前的事。」跟着又加上一句：「賺到錢別忘了我。」

姑姑拿香煙給媽。媽戒煙好幾年了，但仍抽了一枝。她慢慢吸着煙，好像在深深嘆息。夕陽從舊式磚屋的高窗映入，把媽濃密的白髮映成銀灰。煙好像使媽平靜了一點，她靠在椅背上，看來安詳優雅，雖然她只穿着平凡的舊衣衫。和村裏其他女人相比，媽的確有點不一樣。她膚色白，舉止不像農村婦女，走起路來又別有一番節奏。那種氣質，在她幾個孩子身上卻都找不到了。

「你知道，姑姑，我媽很難侍候，」我說。「她小時候有幾個妹仔侍候她。她應該嫁給一個又有錢又細心的男人，不是像我爸那樣的人。」

姑姑聽了笑起來，好像我說的話很荒誕。媽也笑起來，帶着一點讚許。

媽出身富家，她說過很多次她母親的故事：「我外祖父在馬加士（馬達加斯加）做生意賺到錢，回鄉娶妻時年紀已經很大。他的妻子替他生了一個女兒，就是我媽；他再納了三個妾，都沒有得到子女。他請了個秀才來教我媽讀書。我媽

七、八歲時，跟我外祖父說：我不再紮腳了。外祖父吃了一驚，說：好出身的女孩都紮腳，你不紮，將來怎嫁得好人家？但外祖父只得一個女兒，很聽她的話，於是說：至少你也要學穿高跟鞋。我媽出嫁時，外祖父給她一家店鋪和一斤黃金作陪嫁。」

日本入侵後，媽的家境逆轉。她說，她嫁我爸，是因為感激他出席我外祖母的喪禮。喪禮時近農曆新年，親戚都因忌諱不參加。

爸鄉下的祠堂雖重修，但舊貌不再。刻上祖先名字的木牌在文革時燒毀了，沒有再做，只在牆上寫了個大大的壽字。「楊氏宗祠」幾個大字也不用書法，改在電腦的軟件內選字體打印出來然後放大。

一個同村的老人對我說：「附近一條村，把祠堂修建成文革前的樣子，結果被縣裏的人批評，說他們搞四舊。」

吃完酒宴，天已經全黑了，突然有人說，「文革時，也是這個時候走這條路，剛開完會，還要返回田裏去幹活。不同的是，那時候沒飽飯吃。」

回到父親的小屋，爸為媽安排了一檯麻將，就去和我的堂兄弟喝夜茶。我跟着去看村裏的夜生活。有一兩個親戚知道我爸在酒樓，也都來了。爸大聲談笑，

神采飛揚。在鄉下，他很開心，像個孩子般到處走。他喜歡回鄉，其中一個原因，可能是想重溫他那被戰爭剝奪了的童年。他十七歲到廣州的裁縫店做學徒時，大概仍未脫離童年的心態。到他做父親時，大概也還沒有想過他有一個家庭後要負起的責任。

喝茶時一個堂妹問我，「你幾時回來買地？」

「為甚麼我要回來買地？」

「你不記得嗎？上次你回來，指着一大塊田和幾個大魚塘說：有一天我要把這些地都買了，然後在田中央建一間屋。我記得很清楚，因為覺得你說的話很怪。」

「我這樣說過嗎？現在我沒有錢。」

「這裏的地不貴，比香港的便宜得多。」堂妹說。

「對我來說還是貴。」

老實說，我已經記不起說過這些狂妄的話。堂妹說的是二十年前的事，那時村裏有清新空氣，有田，有魚塘，有舊式的小磚屋。現在村旁建了一條連起各村莊直通城市的大型高速公路，四處都是工廠。剩下來的幾塊田，都租給外地來的

民工了。

堂妹說的，又實在像我講過的話。以前我心頭很高，對自己嚴格，對別人的要求也多。在我爸媽看來，要解決生活已經夠艱難了，還要應付一個要求高的孩子，一定覺得相當煩厭。

我們離開酒樓時已過午夜。

回到爸的小屋，看見媽獨自坐着，並不是在樓下的叔叔家打麻將。

「你把我一個人留在這裏！你把我騙到你鄉下，把我丟在這間可怕的空屋裏！」媽一見我們回來，就大聲罵。

「有甚麼可怕？叔叔嬸嬸就在樓下睡覺，」我說。

「他們都在睡覺，不會顧我！」媽看來真的像受了驚。在爸的鄉下，她顯然沒有安全感。

「誰知你們那麼快打完麻將？我以為你們要打到天亮呢！」爸耐心地開解她。見完親戚，他的心情看來特別好。

「你黑心！你把我一個人丟在這裏！」媽哭起來。

第二天，我們到大伯父的家。他躺在床上，臉很瘦，像乾涸了的土地。他認

得出我們的聲音。

「你住在英國。」他溫和地說，語氣和三十年前一樣。

「我回來了，現在住在香港。」我說。

「你當記者……」

「你還記得。」我想說我已經不是記者。但對於他，那已經不再重要了。

「對……」

大伯父睜大了眼，卻像看不見東西。他滿臉滄桑，有很深的歲月痕跡。祖先來自山西貧瘠荒涼的村落，所以在爸的家族裏，每個人臉上都帶着屬於那片荒涼土地的孤寂。大伯父房內的空氣沉鬱，彷彿是過去了的時空。他比我想像中精神。常聽說，人去世前會迴光返照，特別清醒。

大約十天後，大伯父就去世了。他活了近一個世紀。爸回鄉參加喪禮，說喪禮很簡單：城裏的殯儀館運來了一副棺木，跟着運走了遺體和送殯的人。到殯儀館後遺體立刻火化，然後再把送殯的人和骨灰送回村。村裏有墳場供土葬，但只歡迎港、澳、海外華人的遺體。

「每天到屋外走走，」媽看完大伯父後，對大伯娘說。我坐在旁邊的木椅上，

發覺那木椅的設計很特別：坐的地方打磨了兩個彎彎的弧形，坐得很舒服。大伯父本是個木匠，後來才在另一個伯父店裏當雜工。在香港時，他一向住在做工的地方，沒有家。過去十年他住在鄉下，大部分時間獨居；到年紀太老，不能照顧自己，才搬去和妻兒同住。他和大伯娘合不來。

「我每天都到屋外走，」大伯娘說。「但我的手抖個不停。幾年前就開始這樣。」

「吃多一點。」媽說。

「我胃口不好。」

「叫你媳婦用這些乾貝煮粥給你吃。這是我們從香港帶來的。這包給你，這包給大伯父。很好吃，又開胃。」

「你真有心……」

媽叫大伯娘保重，又耐心地把已說過的話重複一遍。

「你對老人家很好，」我對她說。

「這是大家最後一次見面了。」說完她又開始說爸的鄉下不好。問她想去哪裏逛逛，她總說：「我只想回香港。」

幾小時後，我和她返回香港。我也有點受不了鄉下：還未夠二十四小時，我已吃了五大頓飯。

6

這兩年，方蘇見過不少老人家，也畫了不少老人家。他在札記中有以下的記述。

一九九八年十二月十一日

這一個月，我埋頭畫畫，主要是畫老人家。

為甚麼畫老人家呢？

皆因到處都是老人家。香港的人口在老化。其實，整個世界的人口也在老化。

過去一年，我大部分時間呆在正街。那是西營盤一條歷史悠久的斜路。那一帶住了很多老人家，他們看來很孤獨，似乎多數不與下一代同住。但他們相當勤

勞，總愛找些活來幹，賣水果，賣蔬菜，或者賣些小雜貨。有幾個看來已經七、八十歲，還在那裏拾廢紙，賣給廢紙店，換幾塊錢。那裏有個駝背的老婆婆，每晚都餵街上的野貓。我把見到的這些老人家默記下來，再畫粉彩，畫了好一段日子。

今年初，我到廣州去看老父。我在一九六二年離開廣州，之後絕少回去。那趟去看他，是因為他進了醫院。當時他已病重，臉色灰黃。見到我，他的神情顯得有點緊張，也有點迷糊。他已八十六歲，視力還過得去，但卻滿眼紅筋，睛珠灰濁。第二天，我再到醫院看他一次，隨即返港，回去趕着出雜誌。《九十年代》只有三幾個編輯，趕工時，誰也跑不開。回到香港，我描了一張速寫，記下老父住院時的面容。十天後，傳來他去世的消息。

一九九八年十二月十二日

遊罷美國和墨西哥之後，我一直畫粉彩，畫了一個多月。粉彩只是練習，下

一步就是轉回水墨去。除了筆墨，還要有點顏色。於是，我今天展開了採購行動。

中國畫顏料多數用傳統方法製造，沒甚麼質量保證，更大的麻煩是很少地方買得到，我知道的店舖只得三幾家。似乎市面上畫中國畫用的材料愈來愈少，經營這些用品的店舖也買少見少。

記得三十年前，在我仍未荒廢繪畫時，上環有幾家書畫用品店，其中一家本來開在中環，之後搬到上環去。

憑着模糊的記憶，我從上環開始搜索。那裏曾經有一家很有規模的老店，專營書畫用品，希望它仍未消失。

那店舖尚在，就在舊址附近，但已從大街的地舖搬到一座商住大廈裏面去，門面當然今非昔比，小得可憐，情景頗令人唏噓。

店舖在商住大廈外面掛了個小小的招牌。跟着招牌的指引上樓，不難找到。到了那裏，只見店內開了一枱麻將，四個人正玩得高興，還有個店員站在一旁觀戰。

見到我，店員過來招呼，把我要的顏料拿出來給我看。聽到我說要花青，麻

將柏上一個上了年紀的人揚聲答道：「花青我們還有，但質量欠佳。」看樣子他應是店主。他說：「這幾年華東一帶水浸，花青貨源甚少，即使有貨，質量也不好。我們不想賣劣質的東西給顧客。」

我跟他說，我的花青已用完了，不能不買。他建議我少買一點，試它一試。「我們曾經有一批較好的花青，有個畫家叫人來，不問價錢，成批買去。」他說。

跟着我要藤黃，店員給我看的貨色很像碎灰。我說要好的藤黃，而且要多買一點。那個老人家又再揚聲，跟店員說還有塊大的。店員轉到貨架後面去找那塊大傢伙。

「幾個月前，來了個韓國人，要買下這裏所有的藤黃。」老人家說，「我說不行，我要留一些給本地的畫家。」他的說話帶着幾分傲氣。

「這塊藤黃是柬埔寨來的。」他說，「一個朋友替我帶到香港來。現在很難找到好的藤黃，經常混了泥沙。」

那塊大傢伙出來了，看來比我的拳頭大一點。

「你不是要整塊買去吧？」老人家問我。他這麼問，顯然有特殊含意。

「不，不。大概四分之一就夠了。」我答道。

「好，留一些給其他人。」說完，他站起來，拉拉袖子，跟店員說：「讓我來切。」

我向他說聲抱歉，因為妨礙了他打麻將。

「不要緊，」他說，「麻將只是湊興。碰上星期六下午，比較清閑。」

他接過店員手中的菜刀和鐵錘，把那塊大傢伙切了一角，叫店員包好，然後說聲請再光臨，又回到麻將枱去了。

一九九八年十二月十四日

不想再畫過去那些東西，不如從現實生活中找題材。

昨天，我想做一張畫稿，畫一個坐輪椅的老人。磨蹭了兩個鐘頭，結果比預期差一大截。我要畫一個病弱的老人，但畫來畫去都不滿意。

我扔下畫稿，出去蹓蹓，順便看看。出去散步，往往就像做實地考察。我已漸漸形成一個習慣，隨身帶備一個小本子，一枝粗線水筆，看見什麼東西有點意

思就描個速寫。

在中上環之間的歌賦街，我見到一個乾瘦的老頭。他看來老弱多病，走起路來頭往左歪，眼皮浮腫，好像睜不開眼睛。我草草幾筆描下他的神態，再用這張速寫來做畫稿。

今天早上，我在廚房看到窗外一個動人的圖景：一對老伴兒站在一間小屋的陽台上，男的正在替女的剪髮。那老婦右手拿梳，左手持鏡，正在對鏡微笑。

我把黑楊叫到廚房，一起看這個奇景。她說這種情景超乎想像，很應該畫它。

於是，我畫了整整一天，用鉛筆細細地畫，除了把這對老伴兒畫老了十年八年，其餘幾乎百分之百寫實。

黑楊看過畫稿後，認為長方形的鏡子最好改作圓形，說是「圓形帶有象徵意義」。

我照她所說把鏡子改成圓形，畫稿的確好看一點。

文學和藝術常有共通之處，兩者往往都是映現生活的鏡子。不過，作家和畫家往往在他們的作品中加添不那麼寫實的東西，結果有如黑楊所說，「出來的作品

往往比現實生活更為真實。」

一九九八年十二月十五日

一場陰雨之後，昨天驟然轉冷。這種天氣對老人家來說很要命。今天一早，我冒着寒風外出，看看附近的老人家有甚麼不一樣。

上星期，一個和暖的星期天下午，我在荷李活道的小公園見到很多老人家。今天這麼冷，他們大概都留在室內，不會出來捱冷吧？事實卻出乎意料，小公園內還見到十多個老人。我在那一帶轉了個圈，才明白那些老人家為甚麼要出來捱冷，原因是他們沒事可做，也沒地方可去。

那小公園絕不是個好去處。那一帶人口稠密，公園四周都是樓房，附近有幾所私營的安老院。一個慈善團體開辦的老人護理中心，就在兩個路口外。再過一個路口就是一間醫院。更糟的是，公園對面就有幾家長生店，賣棺木等殯葬用品。

在香港這個人口密度特高的城市，老人院環境好不到那裏去，私營的環境更

加不堪。我到一家私營的老人院看過，那地方異常擠逼，了無生氣，裏面看來像個營房。一個大廳房，擺了二、三十張木床，一張床就是一個宿位。除了木床，見不到其他設施。那裏住的老人百無聊賴，只要還能走路，都不願在大白天呆在那裏，院裏的職工也勸他們到戶外走一走。

有些和家人同住的老人家，情況比住老人院更差。他們住的地方侷促，白天家裏空空蕩蕩，沒有人照應。

看着那些老人家茫茫然地坐在公園裏，不禁有點心酸。

晚上，聽了一個小故事：一個即將退休的人，每次走進公園，見到那些百無聊賴的老人家坐在那裏，他總難免對自己說：「我很快也會跟你們一樣。」說真的，除了坐公園，香港的老人家還能有甚麼寄托？

一九九九年一月十五日

昨天早上去吃早茶，對座的人在看報，有兩條標題很奪目：

一、巴西貨幣貶值觸發全球股市下挫，香港恒生指數週三急跌七七二點。

二、天氣寒冷，九名老人在家或在老人院喪命。另一股冷鋒南下，寒冷天氣持續。

一九九九年三月十二日

駝背婆婆總是在晚上九時左右到街上去餵貓。我畫粉彩時，餵貓的圖像也是夜景。

從上個月起，我開始把粉彩轉成水墨。畫餵貓圖時，背景留白，沒有着色。因為背景留白，看來好像是白天。

過去一個月，這張畫我畫了一次又一次，基本上是練筆，背景一直留白。我對自己說：這張畫最終必須是夜景。

今天我又畫了它一次，效果看來較為滿意。

我想，應該是時候在背景上做點工夫了。於是，我動手染底色，先用淡墨，再上花青，最後還加了一道黃光。畫畫在宣紙上，染底色時用韓國紙墊着。宣紙的好處是筆墨分明，但卻難於烘染。

晚上寫札記時，這張畫只乾了兩三成。在春霧瀰漫的日子裏，天氣潮濕，濕透的畫再過五個鐘頭也乾不透。不過，我相信這一張會過得去，因為我用的五尺舊宣紙既宜筆墨，也宜着色。

一九九九年五月二十一日

昨天和黑楊去找上窰博物館，那是一列老村屋的遺蹟。之後，我們在北潭涌和萬宜水塘之間漫步，然後再坐車到西貢。

在途中，我們竟然三次碰到兩名外籍人士：一對老伴兒。最後我們在一個咖啡座又再相遇，於是攀談起來。他們來自比利時，打算看看香港一些有歷史性的老地方。本來他們要看上窰博物館，但找來找去都找不到。其實我們也差點找不到，因為那地方的路牌令人糊塗。

也是巧合，正好黑楊打算第二天再去看幾個古蹟，那對外籍夫婦極感興趣。黑楊跟他們約好，第二天早上從我們住的地方出發。

今天他們來得很早。我們熬了點豆漿，也讓他們嚐嚐。他們說要看看我畫的

東西，我指給他們看掛在牆上的幾件舊作。

他們意猶未盡，問我還有甚麼別的東西。我鋪開兩張近作：吃三文治的老婦和餵貓的婆婆。他們提了一些問題，聽來很在行，頗有鑑賞力。

傍晚，黑楊罕有地請她父母吃了一頓海鮮，還僱了一艘小艇，大家在海上兜了個圈。之後，她又把父母帶到我們住的地方，沏壺茶，開瓶酒。這一晚節目豐富，她父母坐到午夜才回家去。

黑楊看來情緒很好。「我對兩個外國來的老人很不錯，也許對父母也應該好一點。」她說，「今天，那對比利時老人跟我走了一天。我表示欣賞他們還能像年輕人那樣旅遊。他們告訴我，他們的子女才不會這樣旅遊；又說，他們的孫兒更嬌弱，就因為父母把小孩當作棉花糖，過於呵護。」

一九九九年六月十一日

喪禮往往是老朋友碰頭的場合。

一個大學同學的母親去世，上個星期天辦喪事。我前往弔唁，見到好些當年

的同窗。

七十年代初，我們在學校時，都是理想主義者。那時誰也不甘於死讀書，大家都認為要改變現實，也相信能夠改變現實。

一晃廿五年，大家都經歷了不少滄桑。

那個為亡母辦喪事的朋友一直在美國教大學，教了十八年，母親在香港一家老人院去世。他母親也曾到美國去，跟他同住，但抵受不了小城鎮那種孤單乏味的生活，終於返回香港，後來進了老人院。

有十年八載，那個朋友很熱衷於與中國大陸辦學術交流。以往，他每個月都看《九十年代》，從中了解香港和中國的情況。他對我說：「《九十年代》停辦之後，我沒再看香港的報刊。」

他知道《九十年代》停刊的因由，其他朋友也知道。大家在殯儀館碰面，我還不至於成為他們的話題。他們談的都是工作、家庭和子女，這方面我沒甚麼可以說。

也許是覺得冷落了我，有個朋友在大談工作和子女之餘，轉過來問我的近況。「你現在畫畫，你總是找不容易的事來做，」他說，「你還覺得有些東西要追

尋。」

我無言以對，不知該怎樣說。也許我也應該問他是否覺得還要追尋些甚麼。

一九九九年七月九日

一肥一瘦的兩個老婦，重畫了不知六次還是七次。昨天再畫，仍不滿意。畫中的老婦，肥胖的正在安慰瘦小的。我希望把肥胖的老婦畫得一臉愉悅，把瘦小的一個畫得神情沮喪。可是，畫肥胖的那個老婦總是畫不好，畫瘦小那個卻容易得多。

難道我真的比較擅長畫悲傷的人物？

回頭看這段時間算是完成的幾張人物作品，都是一臉愁容：吃三文治的老婦，緊繃着臉，看來三文治很不對她的胃口。半瞎老婦的頭像，也是悲戚的神情。

究竟是甚麼原因？為甚麼我畫悲傷的人物比較傳神？難道真的像黑楊說的那樣，我從小到大見到太多悲慘的事物？

「那些悲慘的事物早已深入你的潛意識，已經根深蒂固。」她說，「不如好好利用，畫一系列悲傷的人物，把這個系列叫做悲慘世界。」

這倒是個好主意，但我還是要學會畫歡欣的面孔。就以一肥一瘦的兩個老婦為例，兩人一喜一悲，看來才會有較強烈的對比。我很應該多作些觀察，多做點速寫。

「香港是怎樣的地方，你也知道。」我跟黑楊說，「肥胖的人很多，但快樂的人很少。」

「對，」她答道，「快樂的人不多。」

一九九九年七月二十五日

屋主的母親有兩貓一狗。她對待畜牲確是另有一套，既甚少理會，也很少餵飼，貓狗由兒子飼養。

她有四個兒子，老大和老二都在英國謀生，老三和老四留在香港。她一個人住在一間老屋裏，兒子各有自己的丁屋，就在附近，都是新建的。作為新界原居

民，男丁有丁權，政府要批地給他們建屋。新型的丁屋樓高三層，很多屋主出租一兩層，賺取租金。

我和黑楊租了其中一間丁屋的二樓，隔壁就是屋主母親的老屋。我們的屋主其實是四兄弟中的老二，他人在英國，屋子出租的事務由老三和老四代理。

幾年前，他們的老母親中風，肢體局部癱瘓，走路有困難。她已不再舉炊，因此不再餵貓餵狗。貓狗由兒子和兒媳餵養，他們吃剩甚麼就給貓狗甚麼，供應最多的是米飯和熬過湯的雞。他們給貓狗吃大塊大塊的雞，往往是很完整的半隻，但貓狗顯然不大欣賞水煮的味道。我和黑楊經常給貓狗一些美味的小食，貓狗漸漸喜歡跟我們。

房東母親的兩隻貓，一雌一雄。雌貓長得毛色黑亮，四蹄踏雪。上個星期五，房東在屋子前庭開了個燒烤晚會，相信是因為幾兄弟中的老大和妻女回港，一家人聚一聚。入夜前，黑楊和我外出散步之後回家，也應邀湊個熱鬧。就在大夥兒邊吃邊談時，黑貓在一旁生了一窩小貓。

黑貓懷胎已有一段日子，肚皮一天比一天大。大概因為屋子四周沒有合適的容身之所，它佔據了房東母親的老屋前空置的狗屋，用作產房。我給它一個紙皮

箱，墊了一條軟綿綿的舊毛巾，作為貓窩。它似乎很滿意我提供的育嬰設施。那條大黃狗似乎也樂於讓黑貓暫時佔用空置的狗屋。

「唷！」正在圍爐吃喝時，一個輕快的女聲突然響起。大家轉身去看，三幾個女人正聚在邊上，其中一個指着狗屋叫道，「看，黑貓正在生小貓。」

幾個女人向狗屋圍過去，要看個仔細。

「噢，第二隻！」幾分鐘後，她們又呼叫起來。

「第三隻！」

還不到半個小時，五隻小東西都鑽出來了。我過去看時，見到四隻剛出生的小貓正趴在黑貓的肚皮上吮奶。

「第五隻看來活不了，它完全不會動。」其中一個女人說。

房東一家子，老大的妻子最隨和。燒烤會散夥時，黑楊過去跟這位大嫂聊了幾句。「聽鄰居說，她見過黑貓大肚皮，但卻從來沒見過它有小貓。」

「我家老太婆把小貓都扔掉了。」大嫂說，「這種事，我們的老佛爺做得來。」

第二天清早，黑楊和我不到六點就起來，下樓去看貓。我們只不過比房東的

母親早一步。

看着這位老太婆打開門，從她的老屋裏冒出來，一步一步向狗屋走過來，眼睛瞪着狗屋，我們都不免有點緊張。老太婆會怎樣做，實在難以逆料。她朝狗屋裏看了一會，轉過來對我們嘰哩咕嚕地不知說些甚麼。她操的方言，我們聽不懂。

「噯？」她提高嗓門問道。

「噯！」黑楊高聲答道。

當時我們都不知道「噯」表示甚麼，猜想應該是「要」的意思。只見老太婆撐着枴杖走開，一邊走，一邊嘰哩咕嚕地不知說些甚麼。

星期六黃昏時分，黑楊一個朋友聞風而至，與丈夫和兩個小孩一起來看剛出生的小貓。

「瞧，」她指着黑貓對兩個兒子說，「貓媽媽很辛苦，要整天照顧小貓。」

第二天，黑楊另一個朋友攜子來訪，同樣指着貓媽媽，對兒子講了同一番道理。

一九九九年八月三日

我有張粉彩是幾個月之前畫的，畫一個老婆婆在翻垃圾。今天，我用這張粉彩做底稿，畫水墨，把老婆婆翻垃圾改成拾汽水罐。

香港有不少老人家靠拾破爛來打發時間，藉此換幾塊錢。拾破爛能換多少錢？我不知道，相信少得可憐。

有一次，我和黑楊見到一個駝背的老婆婆拖着兩箱廢紙，從正街下面往上拉。駝背婆婆很瘦弱，兩箱廢紙不太重，但她拉得很吃力。我們幫了她一把，她頗為高興。後來我做了一張畫稿，畫她拉廢紙，這張畫稿也轉成了水墨。

一九九九年八月七日

祖母和孫兒蹣跚同行的圖像，我還未搬到村屋已經畫了好幾次，但總是畫不好。畫稿是去年底做的，那是我在大埔見到的情景：一個老婆婆柱着枴杖，走得很慢；攙扶着她的少年人，看來是個弱智的男孩。那老婆婆很矮小，但伴着她的

少年人卻長得很肥大。原來的畫稿是粉彩，只畫了祖孫兩人的上半身。當初嘗試把粉彩轉成水墨時，我只是原稿照抄，畫上半身。

這次再畫，我決定畫「全相」，用六尺宣紙，把祖孫兩人從頭畫到腳，並且畫成真人大小。

第一張只用水墨，因效果太差，沒有着色。

第二天，我再畫一次，先在描鉛筆底稿時做足工夫，之後才醮墨落筆，效果還算滿意，可以着色。

這張畫完成後，看來有點特殊的意味。畫中的一老一少，似乎是少年攙扶着祖母，但這兩個人到底是誰在扶持着誰，實在說不清。

一九九九年八月十九日

前幾天，天氣酷熱，我在屋裏悶了一天。傍晚太陽下山時，我上天台去舒一口氣。天台上豎了兩枝電視天線，還有一個接收衛星電視的鍋型裝置。

在這條村裏，家家戶戶的天台都裝了天線，無一例外。我也有電視機，但卻

甚少看電視。搬進村屋之後，我把電視接上戶外天線，但收不到影像。我和黑楊都不是電視迷，沒電視看，倒樂得清靜。結果，我們沒有修理天線，反而在電視熒光屏上掛了一張馬蹄蘭。

房東的母親住在隔鄰的老屋中，她的天台上豎了兩枝天線。這個老太婆也許是標準電視迷，她有兩部電視機，地下的客廳有一部，樓上的房間又有一部。每天晚上，她都把自己關起來，開着電視機。

我剛搬進村屋才幾天，就應邀或被傳召到她的老屋去，給她示範如何開電視機。那趟是她的電視遙控器失靈，她的兒子可能不在家，又或者聽不到她的召喚，於是找我幫忙。老太婆行動不便，看電視是她僅有的娛樂。電視機失靈，非同小可。

在天台上，看着天色漸暗，一道道閃動着的藍光從老太婆的屋子裏透過玻璃窗射出來。老太婆肯定是在看電視，也許她未入夜已開了電視機。

我突然想到，為何不畫老人家獨自看電視的情景。第二天，我描了一張草圖，在老太婆旁邊加了一隻貓，令她看來更為孤獨。

之後連續三天，我設法把草圖畫成水墨。畫這張畫的感覺很特別：其一是電

視與現代人的生活關係微妙，應該描繪一下；其二是這張畫的色彩不妨奇幻一點，有別於常見的中國水墨畫。

這張畫今天畫第三次，接近完成。

「這張怎樣？」黑楊問，「滿意吧？」

「不滿意，」我說，「畫面鬆散了一點，看來應該壓縮一下，改用五尺的宣紙。還有，用筆應該再簡化一下。」

一九九九年八月二十一日

今天繼續畫迷上了電視的老婆婆，下午完成，之後天氣轉壞。

晚上，這張畫乾了八成，我把它掛在自製的板屏上，和昨天用六尺宣紙畫的那一張並列，方便自己比較。做這種比較很有意思，而且相當有用，可以使自己知道應該怎樣改進。

相比之下，今天畫的那張明顯比昨天那張好：用筆比較簡單，顏色比較明淨，老婆婆的面部表情比較複雜，旁邊的黑貓也少了一點漫畫味道和多了幾分好

奇的神色。

「這個老人家看來很難相處，」黑楊指着今天畫的那張說，「昨天那張只覺得她孤獨。需知很多老人家之所以孤獨，不單是因為年輕的一代不照顧他們，而是他們太頑固、太難相處，令人敬而遠之。房東的老媽就是現成的例子。不錯，她很孤獨，但有時也實在難以令人同情，因為她太難相處了。現代人的生活很複雜，現代人的繪畫也應該能反映這種複雜性。因此，今天這張比昨天那張好。」

一九九九年九月七日

要把路祭的粉彩改畫成水墨，難度較高。我畫了三天，從星期四畫到星期六，沒一張滿意。到了星期天，我索性做其他畫稿，隔一天才再畫路祭的圖象。昨天重畫的一張，看來還可以，於是今天早上着色。

路祭的粉彩是在第三街見到的情景，原畫只見半個人，燒冥鏹的老婦只見到面部和雙手，從旁協助的人是個小伙子。轉成水墨時，我把老婦從頭到腳畫上去，把她旁邊的小伙子改畫成一個老伯伯。

因為是街景，當初只是簡單的速寫，之後畫成粉彩。當然，畫人最好是有模特兒，但誰會坐着或站着給我畫？攝影會有幫助，但照樣畫就太沒有意思了。

從速寫到最後畫成水墨，之間要做很多畫稿。小張速寫有時只需要幾分鐘，畫一張水墨需要的時間也不太多，但做畫稿卻要用很多很多時間。對我來說，整個過程就像跑上斜坡，再向下跑。速寫就是開步往上跑，到畫水墨時已過了坡頂往下跑，最吃力是中間做畫稿那個階段。至於看畫的人，他們只見到最後完成的作品，畫畫的人才知道創作過程的艱辛。

一九九九年十一月十九日

澳門的東帝汶難民快要離境了。上一趟到難民收容中心去看他們，聽說離境日期是十一月二十日，現在突然提前兩天。

黑楊打算在難民離去時再看看他們。去年印尼前總統蘇哈圖下台時，黑楊曾往東帝汶採訪，那時東帝汶仍在印尼管治之下。最近東帝汶進行全民投票，多數人贊成獨立。全民公決之後，暴亂爆發；親印尼的民兵，相信受印尼軍方撐腰，

點起了戰火，到處襲擊平民百姓。因為情況急劇惡化，東帝汶很多人外出避難，跑到澳門的也有一百多人，被葡萄牙政府暫時收容。這批難民呆在收容中心，等待安排返回老家或到葡萄牙去。澳葡政府當然希望難民早日離開，絕不可能遲於十二月二十日，亦即澳門移交之日。葡國人佔據澳門四百年，這段歷史終於要畫上句號了。

「我要把東帝汶的人寫到我的小說裏去，」黑楊說，「我喜歡東帝汶的人，他們很善良。總有一天，我會在東帝汶開一個咖啡園，為當地人提供一些就業機會。」

她決定再到澳門去一趟，當晚和東帝汶難民最後聚一聚。我們午後坐船到澳門，入夜之前抵達。

晚上九時，我們到了難民收容中心，找到一個英語說得不錯的女子，名叫瑪利亞。她今年三十三歲，帶着一個四、五歲的女兒。她曾是東帝汶大學的教師，教植物學和農業。收容中心裏的年輕人多數選擇遠赴葡萄牙，但瑪利亞卻打算和丈夫回到東帝汶去過簡單的生活。

「我會先幹點農活，」她說，「我不知道大學甚麼時候才能恢復正常。」

黑楊和她談得很好，甚至談到在東帝汶經營一個咖啡園，種一百株咖啡樹，要投資多少錢。

「大概一千塊美元吧。」瑪利亞說。

「不多，」黑楊笑起來，轉過來對我說，「快點富起來，我們要在東帝汶開個咖啡園。你知道我喜歡喝咖啡。」

返回東帝汶的難民要在早上七時之前登機，瑪利亞看來已有睡意，但仍跟黑楊談得無休無止。之後來了個老先生，原來是瑪利亞的家翁，曾在印尼治下當過東帝汶的政府公務員和議會議員。

這位老先生儼然是收容中心裏的顯貴，我們到訪時也曾和他聊了幾句。之後，我們和瑪利亞說話時，他要接受電視採訪。他以為我們也是記者，於是過來打招呼。

黑楊和這位老先生不投契，只喜歡跟瑪利亞說話，老先生由我去打發。他無所不談，說得多，聽得少，人都倦了，還要說下去。我們叫他歇一歇，睡幾個小時。

凌晨三時，我們才離開收容中心。

「這個時候，該到哪裏去呢？」我說，「我們沒訂酒店的房間。」

「你肚子餓不餓？」黑楊問我。「不如叫輛的士找個地方吃點東西，好嗎？」

上了的士，司機說吃東西的地多的是，結果我們去了最多香港人光顧的賭場，找了一間二十四小時營業的餐廳。餐廳和走廊隔着一塊玻璃，走廊的景觀令人無法不為之動容。十來個年輕女子，在玻璃外緩步穿梭，一看就知道是那些俗稱「北姑」的女子，他們南下的目的就是從某些男人身上賺幾塊錢。

「不是說澳葡政府已在努力清理澳門，為移交作準備嗎？」我說，「他們不可能樂意讓人見到這些女子存在，可是現在她們依然走來走去。」

「這就是澳門，」黑楊說。「你有想過把這種情景畫下來嗎？」

「聽起來很有挑戰性。我會想一想。」

吃完東西，我們慢慢走到市政廳前面的廣場，坐在長凳上等待破曉。天氣很冷，寒風刺骨，黑楊背靠着我取暖，很快就睡着了。我只好抵着寒風，努力睜大眼睛，一直熬到天亮。

一九九九年十二月一日

今天我又往城裏跑，去訂澳門的酒店。我只知道黑楊要在十二月二十日澳門回歸之前再去一趟，但沒想到這段時間竟然會不斷地往返澳門。

黑楊說她不喜歡澳門，她不斷往返澳門，「主要是為了還未完成的小說。」上個月我們到澳門去，認識了一些從其他地方來的人。「那些人的故事會變成小說的一部分，」黑楊說，「我要和其中一些人再談一談。」

那些目標人物之中，有一個是在難民收容中心蹤到的「肥姨」。她是帝汶華僑，幾乎每天到收容中心去協助那些難民。她和東帝汶來的人語言相通，很受難民歡迎。她每天帶着各種藥品，主要是中藥和成藥，給感冒、咳嗽或頭痛、胃痛的人服食。那些難民都信任她。

「我丈夫是中醫，」她自我介紹，並聲稱家人一直在澳門、帝汶和南洋一帶做生意。五十年代末或六十年代初，她曾到大陸去接受高等教育，但很快就「受不了，連書也不讀了」。終於她留在澳門。

「我喜歡帝汶的人，總覺得自己是他們一份子。我自願幫助他們，不收受任何

報酬。」她打開隨身攜帶的旅行袋，裏面塞滿了奇奇怪怪的東西。「都是給他們的東西，是我用自己的錢買的。」

問她是否喜歡澳門，她說，「我才不會死在這裏，我會回到帝汶去，死在那裏。」

我們在澳門還認識了一個緬甸伯伯。因為聽說「三盞燈」一帶住了不少緬甸華僑，我們就到那裏一間很便宜的麵店去蹓一碰，結果認識了緬甸伯伯和麵店的東主，原來店主也是緬甸華僑。聽他們說，從六十年代起，緬甸的政治和經濟狀況惡化，華僑陸續離開。當時緬甸政府效法中國大陸，走社會主義道路，實行集體經濟，沒收私有財產。華人在緬甸多數經商，財產被沒收，等同被洗劫。他們多數申報無國籍，離開緬甸，不少人到了澳門。

緬甸伯伯一九六七年到澳門，麵店東主比他晚一點，七十年代初才到澳門。他們和其他緬甸華人一樣，聚居在「三盞燈」一帶。他們說，現在澳門的緬甸華僑估計有好幾萬人。

我大舅父也曾在緬甸生活了二十年。我這麼一說，緬甸伯伯立即把我和黑楊當作老朋友。「我舅父在一九六六年離開緬甸，」我說。「他也在澳門住了一年，

住在紅街市。」

「紅街市！」他聽了很興奮，「就在附近。」

他講了很多自己的故事，講日軍佔領時的緬甸，講戰後的情況，講緬甸政府怎樣學中國大陸搞共產。

緬甸伯伯和麵店東主很有興趣談緬甸，談得最多的是回去旅行。「我的孩子對緬甸一點興趣也沒有，」緬甸伯伯說，「他們都是在澳門出生的。」

一九九九年十二月二十七日

黑楊和她爸媽一起回鄉。她說，此行的目的就是為了找點寫小說的素材。她和父母合不來，只要在一起，言語上就會有磨擦。如果不是為了寫書，她才不會跟父母上路，到她爸爸的鄉下去。

她生於香港，從來不覺得她爸爸的鄉下是自己的故鄉。她根本不認識鄉下的人，但她爸爸在鄉下卻很吃得開。他經常回鄉，樂此不疲。

鄉下的祠堂重修，她爸爸有兩個男孩、一個男孫，因此要回去風光一下。對

於他這種思想，黑楊最為反感。

「我只去幾天，」黑楊說，「如果受不了，我很快就會回來。」

她昨天一早去火車站。我送她到村口就回家轉，繼續刻圖章。我把最大的兩方印石磨掉再次重刻。其中一方刻四十個字，幾乎花了一整天。晚上，我做些小修改，搞了好幾個鐘頭，凌晨兩點才睡覺。

我好幾個月沒搞得這麼晚了。黑楊經常提醒我不要過勞，有時她乾脆下禁令，要我停工。

「休息一下，不要像機器那樣，停下來想一想，」她說。

一九九九年十二月二十八日

「我回來了，」黑楊在電話裏說，「我回到香港了，和我媽一起回來。等會兒我會告訴你發生了甚麼事。」

才去了兩天，這麼快就回來了，肯定出了毛病。

「對，的確出了毛病，」見到她時，她這樣說。「我爸媽不斷吵鬧。他們吵過

不休，無論是甚麼，意見都不一樣，結果吵得喉頭也沙啞了。我媽尤其麻煩，她搞得人人都不開心，大概是她身體不舒服吧。昨天我們上了車，要到甚麼地方去，但沒有人知道去哪裏。司機問我爸，我爸指着我媽，但她只是嚷着，『我甚麼地方都不去，我要回香港。』因此我今天一早帶她出廣州，坐直通車回來。」

「你找到甚麼值得寫的東西嗎？」我問。

「一點點，」她說，「這趟我算是很有耐性了。」

二〇〇〇年一月十九日

前天傍晚，我去扔垃圾，回來時見到一個不尋常的情景：鄰居的老婦在兒子和媳婦拱護之下，掙扎着要到甚麼地方去。這次她不是撐着常用的拐杖，而是撐着四隻腳的支架。我是第一次見到她用助行器。她兩個兒媳之中，一個快步上前開路，在通道盡頭的梯級邊守候着。

「阿婆怎樣了？」我問她那個兒媳。

「她說腳痛，」她兒媳答道，眼睛一直盯着老人家和她的護送隊伍。「我們要

送她到醫院了。」

「有沒有叫救護車？」我問。

「沒叫救護車，」她說，「我們自己開車。」

「需要我幫忙嗎？」

「不用了，謝謝！」

我站到一旁做看客，看着他們一步一步地慢慢走完那條通道，很困難地走下梯級。

我回到樓上去，迎來黑楊一番唇舌。

「幫忙？你長了腦袋沒有？你甚麼都不該做，你幫不上忙。他們應該叫救護車，阿婆曾經中過風……」

她長篇大論地說過不休，我完全沒機會插一句話，更說不清在下面發生了甚麼事。

有時她就是這樣：她惱火了，就不聽任何解釋；我只好閉嘴，但聽了也等於沒聽。

「我不如省一口氣，早點睡覺。」她結束了她的獨白，睡覺去了。

那天我睡得很晚。臨睡之前撕了一些廢紙，扔進垃圾桶去。晚上我做了一個惡夢，在夢中大叫起來。

「甚麼事？」黑楊問。

「做惡夢了。」我說。

「夢見甚麼？」

「有人要搶我的畫稿，撕破了。」

「甚麼樣的畫稿？」

「上面有三個人，其中兩個只見背部，但幾乎填滿了整個畫面。」

「能畫出來嗎？」

「好，明早畫。」

「你壓力太大了，」她嘆了一口氣。「也許我應該少點評論你畫的東西，讓你少受點壓力。」

她喜歡評論任何事物，尤其是藝術品。我樂於讓她做藝評家，有時她的說法很有啟發性。

第二天，我做了兩張畫稿：第一張畫一個老婦彎低腰，撐着助行器，一男一

女跟着她，但卻沒有攙扶她；第二張畫夢中見到的情景，一男一女兩個巨大的背影填滿了畫面，中間的空隙畫了第一張畫稿的縮影。

「我喜歡這一張，」黑楊指着第二張畫稿，開始作出評論。「這一張的透視很不一樣。如果我做的夢能幫助我寫作，那就好了。」

「至於這一張，」她指着第一張畫稿說，「我喜歡女人的兩隻手，看來很怪異。你知道甚麼是身體語言。人的雙手經常表達了一些東西。再看那男人的手，雖然表達了一些東西，但太簡單、太直接了。也許你應該學點……」

「手語，」我接着說。

「對。」

「好，下趟到大學圖書館去借本手語看一看。」

7

有個朋友告訴我，她的親戚在家中遇劫時心臟病發死了，自此她的母親就很怕獨自一個人在家。聽了她的話後，我想起幾個月前返鄉下時媽那種缺乏安全感的表現，我也很想找出媽怕獨處的原因。

「媽，你不是說過你年幼時，家被土匪搶掠嗎？」我和爸媽喝早茶時問她。那天是星期天，一個晴朗的秋日。

「不單是我家，整條村都被搶掠。我父親一家住圍村，有圍牆和護村河，照理土匪是很難入村的，所以當時有人說土匪買通了一些家人，放他們進村。那時我不在村裏，你外祖母把我們帶到她外家那裏住。」媽說。

「為甚麼？」

「因為我祖父被綁票了，我媽怕我哥哥成為綁票目標，搬回外家了。」

「那時綁票十分普遍，你有個伯伯就差點被綁票了，因為他是獨子，所以成為

目標，後來他要躲在我們村裏……」爸插嘴說。

「你祖父後來怎樣了？」我問媽。

「噢，他實在很滑稽！他在南非住了很久，甚麼都不怕……他對綁匪說：你們好好待我，我的兒子和媳婦一定會贖我，我大媳婦外家很有錢。我每天要吃綠豆沙，你們最好煮給我吃。好好待我，倘若我死了，你們就連贖金也沒有……我祖父就是那樣對綁匪說。那時，村裏只有女人，所以我媽要跟綁匪講價。我父親當時已經過世了，我的叔叔都在南非。我媽跟綁匪講了兩三次，就用她外家的錢贖了我祖父，贖金好像是十萬港幣。那時綁匪要香港的貨幣，他們叫港幣做西紙……」

「十萬港幣？在三十年代，十萬港幣是很大的數目！你媽這麼有錢？」

「或者我記錯了，那時我年紀很小。但我媽的外家的確很有錢。他們在廣州做批發生意，賣花生油。聽我媽說，贖金不單是十萬港幣，綁匪還要十幾打英國製的汗衫，一種叫三個五的牌子……」

「三個五這個牌子的汗衫當時很出名，只在廣州的幾間商店有得賣，人人都想有一件。綁匪要求贖金時都要三個五這個牌子的汗衫……」爸又插嘴說。

「他們還要當時最流行的香煙，好像叫黑貓，要十幾條，每條十包，每包二十

支……」

「二十支？不！那時的煙怎有那麼大包！每包只有十支！最流行的煙也不是叫黑貓……」爸說。

「你外祖母說：我怎能眼白白看着他們殺一個老人……」媽說，「所以你外祖母付了贖金。而且她相信當時綁匪的目標是我哥哥，只因為當時我們不在家，綁匪才拉走我祖父。我祖母向綁匪大叫，想阻止綁匪放火燒家裏存放着的絲帛，我祖父母家以往養蠶取絲。綁匪開槍打傷了我祖母，她後來流血過多致死。」

「你是不是因為這些經過，很怕獨自一個人在家？」我問媽。

「不……我從沒有想過這個問題……也有可能……但我想是日本仔打中國時到處投炸彈，嚇怕了，」媽說。「我爸在上海開鞋店，日本仔投了個炸彈在他店旁。他嚇破了膽，回到鄉下後不久就死了。」

我轉向爸，問他：「如果我想寫你的故事，你想我寫些甚麼？」

「當然是寫我鄉下！」爸很自豪的說。「聽着，日本仔打中國前，我鄉下已經有童子軍。我一個叔叔黃埔軍校畢業，但他不想從軍，於是回鄉下成立了一支童子軍……鄉下有副對聯，你最好把它記錄下來！」他跟着開始唸對聯。

「你自己呢？你想我寫甚麼？」我問爸。

「等一會，我還未講完鄉下……」他繼續唸對聯。

知道爸一開始講鄉下，就會講個不休，我轉問我媽：「我小時候是個怎樣的孩子？」

「嘿！你？你就算看到有張椅子阻着你的去路，你也不會動手去推開它！你只會繞過它走，你只顧着唸你的書。」

「我記得你以前常對我說：你有甚麼用？你不肯教你的弟弟。只有你考得好成績有甚麼用？你這麼自私，有甚麼用？」

「你當然沒有用，你不教你的弟弟！」媽帶怒說。然後她轉向方蘇：「你猜她對我說些甚麼？她說：我靠自己努力，他們也應該靠他們自己，上課留心點。她居然這樣對我說，嘿！」

「你還想我寫些甚麼？」我轉問我爸。

「我一生中，有次最驚險了！那時日本仔打中國，有日本軍隊住在我的村裏，他們霸佔了火車路附近的幾間大屋。有次我和幾個朋友想去火車路附近一個地方，突然一隊日本軍出現了。他們大概以為我們準備去破壞鐵路，所以立刻來追

我們。我們跳入魚塘，他們竟坐快艇來追。那是我一生中最驚險的時刻了……那些日本兵通常對村裏的小孩不錯。他們坐火車時，常把一仙的硬幣扔到魚塘，我和村裏的小孩就會跳到魚塘裏去拾，有時他們會扔麵包……」

「只有你們村裏的人才會去拾日本兵扔出來的食物！我們村裏的人不會要日本兵的東西！日本兵把飯扔出來，我們也不會拾。他們把麥混在飯裏煮，很怪……我們自己有飯吃……不會吃日本兵的東西……」媽驕傲地說。媽對中國的感情很特殊。二十年前，我到南京旅遊時，把她給我的錢全部花在一個清嘉慶年代的沉石墨硯上。我以為媽會罵我傻，但她只是把墨硯捧在手裏，細細欣賞，然後說：「中國有很多好東西，我們要盡量保留。」

「賣蔬菜的點心車來了，你要甚麼菜？」方蘇突然問我。

「不要不要！在這種貴價茶樓吃菜，傻了嗎？街市幾塊錢一斤菜，這裏幾十塊一小碟……」爸大聲反對。

「要碟菜吧！」方蘇看着我說。「叫了的點心都是肉類，你沒吃過東西……」

「你不吃肉，有甚麼用？」爸對我大叫。「吃素有甚麼用？真蠢！沒有用！」

「好了，好了，不要叫蔬菜。」我對方蘇說。

「但你沒東西吃……」方蘇還想把賣蔬菜的點心車叫住。

「在這種酒樓吃蔬菜！真蠢！」爸又開始大叫。

「不要叫蔬菜了，方蘇，唉！叫碟肉吧……」我說。

爸開始講地下鐵私有化發售股票的情況。那是當時城中最熱門的話題，全港有十二分一人申請了購買地鐵的股票。

酒樓掛着的水晶燈使我想起年幼時星期天來我家吃晚飯那些叔叔伯伯。回鄉下看祠堂重開時，我遇上他們當中的一個，他像我大伯父一樣，退休後搬回鄉下住。最近我在香港遇上了另一個伯父，他說他不會考慮搬回鄉下，因為他的一個朋友在內地做小手術時意外死了，他對內地的醫院沒有信心。

坐在我們鄰桌的老人家起身走了。他戴着一副舊式眼鏡，臉上有點迷惘，一個人在那裏坐了很久。看着老人遠去的背影，使我想起一九九〇年在德國東部拍的一張照片。照片上也是個老人，他在過馬路，但好像不知該怎樣走，似乎馬路突然變得太繁忙、太難通過。那時東西德的貨幣剛統一。我想起媽對我說過：「解放前那幾年，錢不斷貶值，在早上還可以買一斤米的錢，到了下午就只能買半斤米了。」她說那番話的時候，正是九七年香港主權移交後，不斷傳出港幣會貶

值的消息之時。

酒樓的女服務員鋪檯布時，問新來的茶客：「你看明天的股市會怎樣？」

「早上入貨吧！明天至少會升五百點。」那茶客對她說。

爸吃完點心後說，「你也應寫你祖父，他以前開番攤檔，他做莊家，因為他不但出名老實，而且無論賭注怎麼大，他也不會怯。以前你祖父贏了錢，就會請他的孩子吃雲吞。當時我們有雲吞吃，就不知多高興了……但你小時，我說帶你們上茶樓，你也不去……我的鄉下，以前有很多撈家專門去賭檔賭錢。」

小時候，我的確不願意跟父親上茶樓，尤其是不喜歡吃他們贏了麻將或賽馬贏錢後請孩子吃的東西。因為他們一旦輸了錢，就往往會說孩子們說了不吉利的話，給他們帶來霉運。

「那時有很多專門去賭檔賭錢的撈家，」媽說。「如果一條村莊裏沒有撈家，那條村就會很窮。」

「對，在我那條村，有賭檔有鴉片煙檔。所以我那條村很繁榮。」爸說。

「你知道嗎？我母親的鋪子，也就是我外祖父給她陪嫁那間店鋪，就是租給人開賭檔和鴉片煙檔的，樓下是賭檔，樓上是鴉片煙檔。他們不是每個月交租，而

是每天交租。那時，只有那些生意可以生存，其餘的生意都沒有了，」媽說。

「你們來香港之後呢？你們想我寫些甚麼？」我問。

「沒有甚麼好寫。」爸說。

「你呢？」我問媽。

「沒有甚麼好寫。」媽說。

我轉頭看看四周，那天是二〇〇〇年十月十五日，當天的頭條新聞與歷史有關：中國總理正在日本訪問，日本的電視觀眾問他為甚麼中國人不斷要求日本正式道歉及賠償。

喝完早茶後，我翻出舊照片。過去十年，我拍了不少老人家的照片。有一張是澳門主權移交中國那天拍的。當時我途經一間商店，店裏的電視正在直播最後一次降下葡萄牙國旗的儀式，一羣人圍在電視前，其中一個是老人，他的表情令我難忘。可能他從中國逃難到澳門，忽然發現自己又回到了中國。看到這張照片，我想起爸媽。他們在五十年代曾在澳門住過一段短時間。

「下次我們去澳門，不如叫爸媽一起去。」我對方蘇說。

「你真的想和他們一起去？」方蘇問。

「你不是常常說我應該待爸媽好一點嗎？」

「你爸媽和你弟弟一起時，隨和得多。和你在一起就……我不會再鼓勵你和他們相處。我以為我的家庭夠麻煩了，你的不會更差……你爸媽不喜歡你，原因之一，我想是在吃的方面，你和他們的口味太不相同。」

「你認為這是一個原因嗎？」我笑起來。「說起來也是。對於吃，我從不像他們那般講究，年幼時我就不喜歡吃肉。」

「他們不讓你吃你需要吃的東西，即使是你自己付錢，他們也不喜歡你吃的東西跟他們不同。」方蘇說：「我不會再鼓勵你嘗試和他們相處，你不會令他們快樂。」

「我能令其他人快樂嗎？我只知道，除非我積極去尋找快樂，否則我自己也不會快樂。」

我看着照片中的一群老婦。拍這照片的時候那個地方還叫蘇聯。前蘇聯有很多寡婦，是戰爭和獨裁者製造出來的。我在西伯利亞鐵路的列車上，常見她們冒着嚴寒，在小鎮的火車站賣煮熟了的雞蛋和馬鈴薯。在莫斯科之類的大城市，則常見到她們呆坐在那裏，就像香港的老人一樣，沒有地方可以去。方蘇告訴過

我，有一次他要到一個在我爸媽家附近的巴士總站去，途中見到我爸坐在行車天橋下的空地。很多老人家都呆坐在那裏，好像沒有甚麼可做。爸出身農家，喜歡在戶外活動，他從來都不適應香港那狹小的居住空間。

在格陵蘭時，我拍了很多老人的照片。格陵蘭是丹麥的殖民地。在北極圈以北一個叫烏盼那域的城市，我住在一個老人院負責人的家裏。她是個丹麥和格陵蘭的混血兒。烏盼那域的人仍是以狩獵為生。那兒的老人院比起香港同類養老設施，簡直像個樂土：每個老人都有一間寬敞的房間，窗外就是壯麗的北冰洋。

「過去老人家常常講故事給他們的子孫聽，但現在年輕一代只喜歡看電視。我們的社會轉變得太快了，已經沒有給老人立足之地。要年輕一輩照顧老人，是件很吃力的事，要我和我婆婆一起住，也實在不可能。」她的婆婆就住在她管理的老人院內。「老人院內的老人，他們不愁衣食，需要的東西甚麼都有，但他們就是不開心。」

8

再次畫畫差不多兩年，方蘇在他第一個畫展之前寫了幾則札記，記下他對老人家的一些想法。

二〇〇〇年十月二十日

今天承印商送來展覽目錄的分色稿。四十張圖版，一半以上是畫老人家。人們見了，肯定會問我為甚麼畫這麼多老人家，還會問我對老人家有甚麼觀感。

兩年前，我剛開始用粉彩畫老人家時，主要是受到他們臉上的歲月痕跡所觸動，還有是他們的肢體常有畸型的情況。在街上餵街貓的老婆婆是典型的例子，她的背駝得很厲害。我在西區時經常見到她。餵貓時，她腰彎得很低。我畫粉彩時，誇張了她高聳的背部。其後，在我把粉彩轉成水墨之前，黑楊告訴我，她在

夢中見到這張我仍未動筆的水墨畫。她描述了畫面的大小和一些局部的處理。「就像你的粉彩，水墨也是夜景。」她說，「老婆婆的背脊看來像一些中國山水畫中的山峰。」

我同情那些孤獨和被忽略的老人家。我畫的老人家，多數是這個繁囂的都市中被遺忘的小人物。雖然我同情老人家，但要和老人家同住卻很困難。聽不少朋友說，他們和上一代同住，磨擦很多。

事實上，我和兩年前去世的父親，關係就相當疏遠。還好他一直住在廣州，和香港兩地分隔。他在世時，我甚少去探望他。九八年初，他進了醫院，我到廣州去看他。回來之後，我給他描了一張速寫。幾個月之後，我把速寫畫成粉彩。一年之後，粉彩畫成水墨。和原來的速寫相比，水墨把他的神情畫得更加緊張，更加迷惘。如果他不是那個樣子，我不會用這種手法給他造像。

二〇〇〇年十月二十五日

這一段日子，黑楊和我都覺得要為老人家做點事。「我們的社會沒怎樣幫助老

人家。」她說。

「對，」我說。「我們過去做得太少了，理應覺得慚愧。香港的經濟過去二十年很蓬勃，如果早一點做些準備，老人家就不至於整天呆坐在公園裏，沒有地方去打發時間。」

不錯，要老人家整天困在家裏，並不好受。要他們百無聊賴地坐在公園裏，也不好過。老人院往往死氣沉沉。那些提供長者服務的社區中心，氣氛也不對勁。這麼說，他們還可以到甚麼地方去呢？

最近我們想到了可以開個老人茶座，這個茶座要適合老人家，靠近他們住的地方，售賣健康的食品和飲品，收費廉宜。還有，茶座門前要有塊空地，在澳門叫做「前地」。這塊前地應該經常有各種各樣的表演，供老人家觀賞。

「如果你能賣一些畫，我相信你不介意捐點錢開這個老人茶座。」黑楊說。

「當然，我樂見其成，」我說，「但要經營這個茶座，我們不是適合的人選。」

「我們只是提出建議，讓其他人經營。」黑楊說。「比較理想的情況是連鎖店，香港每個老區都開設老人茶座。我們當然沒有財力，也許要找人支持。」

「好，就策劃一個理想方案。」我說，「也許，在畫畫和寫作之餘，我們可以為老人家請命，替他們做點事。」

二〇〇〇年十一月一日

替我裱畫的老師傅年近七十，但身體硬朗，還可以裱六尺的大畫。他年少時學藝，從事書畫裝裱超過五十年，這種敬業樂業的精神很令人欽佩。

兩個星期之前，我和黑楊到他的工場，看見我四張畫拼裱在牆上。我用宣紙畫水墨，宣紙在裝裱之前很容易破損。裝裱時整張畫要全濕，師傅把托了底的畫裱到牆上晾乾。

那天見到牆上的四張畫，全是畫老人家，有人拾破爛，有人在街市賣東西。「你的畫很現實。」老師傅說。

「對，」黑楊答道。「你裱了這麼多畫，見過有人這樣畫老人家嗎？」

「從未見過，」他說。「哪裏會有畫家畫我們這些老傢伙！」

「你知道嗎？」黑楊指着牆上的畫對我說，「這幾張畫最好用這個辦法展出，

一張靠一張，排成一個系列。」

「說得對，我會跟博物館商量，用這個辦法展出。」我點點頭，然後問老師傅會不會去看我的展覽。

「會，」他說，「博物館的館長認識我。她會邀請我。」

我很希望他能出席展覽的預展會。如果到時讓我說幾句開場白，我會感謝他，還要感謝其他幫助過我的人。

既然我畫了這麼多老人家，應該多安排一些老人家到博物館去看一看。我不知道可以怎樣動員老人家到場，但我相信他們看到這些畫一定會有反應，他們的反應會很有意思。

有些故事，我就是喜歡聽了再聽，其中一個就是老人坐在橋上的那個故事。於是有一天，我打電話給我媽，對她說：「你告訴過我一個故事，說有個老人坐在橋上。你可以再說一遍那個故事嗎？我寫了那個故事，你是不是真的見過那個老人家？」

「噢，你還記得那個故事。我當然沒有見過那個老人家。那是很久以前的事了。故事是我母親告訴我的。那個老人家坐在廣州的海珠橋旁。你聽過海珠橋沒有？那是廣州一條很有名的橋哩！」媽高興地說。我記得她說的故事，她顯然覺得意外。「有一天有個年輕人去問那老人家：你為甚麼天天坐在這裏？那老人家答：我想知道有多少個人走過這條橋？年輕人覺得很奇怪，說：這麼多人在過橋，你怎數得清？老人家嘆了口氣說：今早我只見到十個人。不是每個過橋的都是人，很多都是鬼。我和你都不是人哩！我不知那個故事是不是真的，我沒有

親眼見過那老人家。但我可以告訴你一件我親眼看見的事。有一晚，我醒了，聽到一點聲音，於是問：是誰呀？沒有人答我。我看看四周，你猜我看到誰？觀音！」媽說。

我笑了起來。

「不要笑！我知道你不會相信我，所以從來沒有告訴過你這個故事。那是一九八三年的事了。你會不會把這個故事寫出來？」

「這個……讓我想想……」我說。

「這個故事比坐在橋旁那個老人家的故事更好。這是一件真事，我親眼看見的！」媽認真地說。

跟媽講完電話後，我對方蘇說：「我問過媽那個老人家的故事了。原來有十個是人，不是每個都是冤鬼，這樣好一點。真奇怪，這個故事我聽了很多次，但還是記錯了。」

年幼的時候，我總不明白那個老人家的故事，也不明白在星期天晚上大人們吃晚飯時，在水晶燈下說的那些故事。現在想起來，才知道那是我上過最好的歷史課。

32 Breakfast

Ink and colour on paper

早點

水墨設色紙本

103 x 68 cm (40.5 x 27 in.)

1999

31 The Painter's Father, Days before his Death

Ink and colour on paper

老父，臨終

水墨設色紙本

138 x 83 cm (54 x 32.5 in.)

1999

30 Harvest

Ink and colour on paper

穫

水墨設色紙本

152 x 83 cm (60 x 32.5 in.)

1999

29 Street Cat

Ink and colour on paper

街貓

水墨設色紙本

152 x 83 cm (60 x 32.5 in.)

1999

28 A Walk

Ink and colour on paper

同行

水墨設色紙本

178 x 96 cm (70 x 38 in.)

1999

27 Consolation

Ink and colour on paper

慰

水墨設色紙本

96 x 121 cm (38 x 47.5in.)

1999

26 Difficult Steps

Ink and colour on paper

蹣跚

水墨設色紙本

178 x 96 cm (70 x 38 in.)

1999

25 Offering

Ink and colour on paper

祭

水墨設色紙本

172 x 93 cm (67.5 x 36.5 in.)

1999

24 TV Addictive

Ink and colour on paper

電視迷

水墨設色紙本

152 x 83 cm (60 x 32.5 in.)

1999

23 Idleness

Ink and colour on paper

無聊

水墨設色紙本

152 x 83 cm (60 x 32.5 in.)

2000

22 The Neglected

Ink and colour on paper

遺忘

水墨設色紙本

179 x 98 cm (70.5 x 38.5 in.)

2000

21 The Escorts

Ink and colour on paper

侍

水墨設色紙本

183 x 144 cm (72 x 57 in.)

2000

20 Sharing a Table

Ink and colour on paper

搭檯

水墨設色紙本

171.5 x 93 cm (67.5 x 36.5 in.)

2000

19 Descending

Ink and colour on paper

落

水墨設色紙本

179 x 96 cm (70.5 x 38 in.)

2000

18 Three Generations

Ink and colour on paper

三代人

水墨設色紙本

175 x 124 cm (69 x 48.5 in.)

2000

17

The Outpatients

Ink and color on paper

候診

水墨設色紙本

366 x 144 cm (144 x 57 in.)

2000

16 The Dying Game

Ink and colour on paper

終局

水墨設色紙本

144 x 197 cm (56.5 x 77.5 in.)

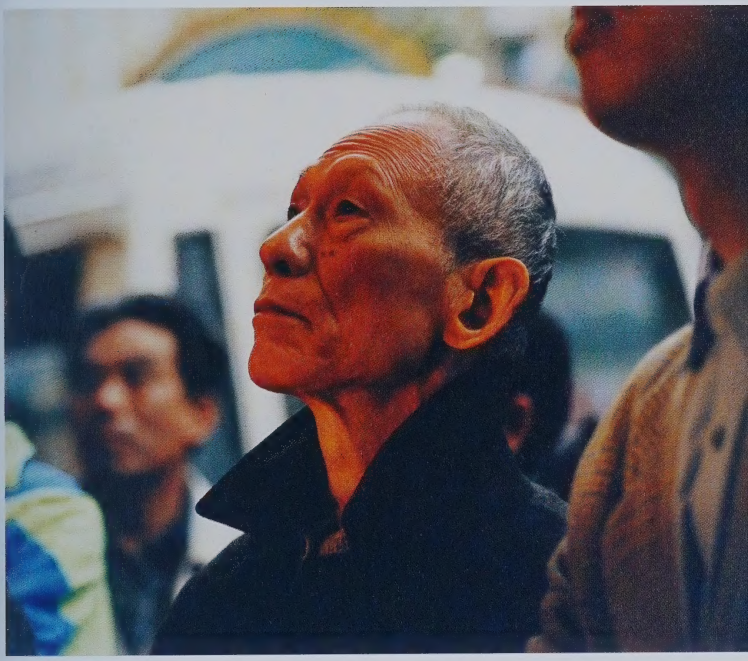
2000

15
Hong Kong
香港 2000

14
Greenland 格陵蘭 1996

13
Mexico 墨西哥 1998

12
Greenland 格陵蘭 1996



11
Macau 澳門 1999

10
Greenland 格陵蘭 1996

9
Mexico 墨西哥 1998

8
Greenland 格陵蘭 1996

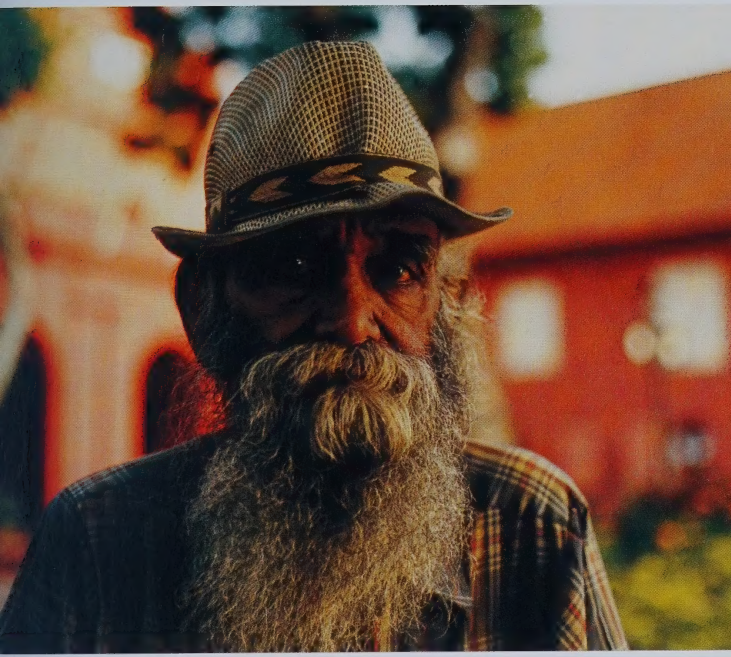
7 Mexico 墨西哥 1998

6
Macau 澳門 1999

5

The Soviet Union 蘇聯 1990

4
Macau 澳門 1999



3
Malaysia 馬來西亞 1998

2
The Soviet Union 蘇聯 1990

1
Germany 德國 1990

Sunday dinners, which were the best history lessons I have ever had.

There are so many crossing the bridge!" The old man sighed, "I've seen only ten human beings this morning. Not all of those on the bridge are human beings. Many are monsters. Neither you nor I are human beings." I don't know whether that story is true or not, I haven't seen that old man myself. But I can tell you about something I really saw. One night, I woke up and heard something. I asked, "Who's there?" No one answered. So I looked around. Do you know who that was? Guanyin, the goddess!' she said.

I laughed.

'Don't laugh! That's why I've never told you that story. I knew that you wouldn't believe me. It was in 1983. Are you going to write about that?'

'Well, let me think about it...'

'It's true! I saw it with my own eyes. That's better than the story about the old man sitting on the bridge!' My mother said seriously.

After that, I said to Fong So, 'I've checked the story of the old man with my mother. There were ten human beings. Not every one was a monster. That's better. It's strange. I've heard that story many times, but I still remember it wrongly.'

I could not appreciate that story when I was young. Nor could I appreciate the stories told during those

9

There are stories I just like to hear again and again. One of them is the one about the old man sitting on a bridge. So one day I called my mother.

'You told me a story about an old man and a bridge. Can you tell me that story again? I have written about it. Did you really see the old man?' I asked her.

'Oh, you still remember that! Of course I didn't see that old man! It happened a long time ago. Your grandmother told me that story. That old man used to sit near the Haizhu Bridge, a famous bridge in Guangzhou,' my mother said happily, obviously pleased that I could remember her story.

'One day a young man went to ask the old man, "Why are you here everyday?" The old man replied, "I want to see how many human beings cross this bridge." The young man was surprised. "How can you count?

come to the museum to see the exhibition. I have no idea how to make them come to the museum. I do not know how many of them have visited the museum before. But I am sure it would be interesting to see their reactions.

Two weeks ago, I went to his workshop with Hark and saw four of my paintings fixed on the wall. I paint on *xuan* paper, which is very fragile before mounting. During the process of mounting, a painting has to be wet through. Then it will be fixed on the wall.

The four paintings on the wall were portraits of old people collecting scraps or selling things in the market. 'You paint realistic scenes,' said the old artisan.

'Yes,' said Hark. 'By the way, have you ever seen other painters paint old people like these?'

'Never,' he replied. 'How can we expect artists to paint old folks like us?'

'You know,' Hark said to me, pointing at the wall, 'this is perhaps the best way to show these paintings - by putting them together, side by side.'

'Yes, I'll tell the museum to show them like this,' I nodded. Then I turned to the old man and asked him, 'will you come to see my exhibition?'

'Oh yes,' he said, 'I know the curator of the museum. She will invite me.'

I really hope he can attend the preview of the exhibition. He is one of the people I should thank if I am supposed to make any opening remarks at the preview.

Perhaps, I should also try to get other old people to

Portuguese they call it a 'largo'. It should be a lively place with all sorts of performances to entertain the elders from time to time.

'I'm sure you won't mind contributing some money to open such a cafe if you can sell some of your paintings,' said Hark.

'Oh yes, I am willing to do that,' I said. 'But we are not the right people to run such a business.'

'We only suggested the idea,' Hark said. 'Ideally speaking, there should be one old people's cafe in every old district in Hong Kong. Of course, we don't have the means for that. We might have to get support to do that.'

'OK. Let's work on an ideal project,' I said. 'Perhaps, besides painting and writing, we can start a campaign for the elderly some time later.'

November 1, 2000

The artisan who mounted most of my paintings is nearly seventy. He is still physically fit enough to mount the six-foot paintings. He learned the art of mounting Chinese paintings at a young age and has stayed in that profession for more than fifty years. His persistence is admirable.

painted him in that way.

October 25, 2000

For quite some time, Hark and I have been talking about doing something for the old people. 'Our community is doing too little to help the elders,' she said.

'That's true,' I said. 'It's a shame that we have done too little for the elderly. Hong Kong has been quite wealthy for the past twenty years. If something had been done earlier, old people would have somewhere to go during the day, rather than sitting idly in the park.'

Yes, it is no good for old people to get stuck at home all day. But it is no good for them to sit listlessly in the park either. The old people's home is not a pleasant place for them. Even some community centres that provide services to the elders are too depressing for them. So, where can they go?

It is only recently that we come up with the idea of opening an old people's cafe. Such a cafe should be a friendly place for the elders. Access should be easy and it should sell healthy and less expensive food and drinks. There should be an open area in front of the cafe - in

when she bent low to feed the cats. When I did the pastel, I exaggerated her back. Some time later, before I transposed the study into a painting, Hark told me she had dreamed about the not yet executed painting. She described the size of the painting and even some small details. 'Just like your pastel, it's a night scene,' she said. 'And the old woman's back looks like a mountain in some Chinese paintings of landscapes.'

I think I am also sympathetic to those lonely and neglected old people. Most of the old people I painted are those who have been left behind in the city rush. Of course, they are not easy people to live with. My friends have told me many stories about the difficulties of living under the same roof with the older generation.

In fact, I have to say that I had a very difficult relationship with my father who died two years ago. It was fortunate for me that he lived not in Hong Kong but in Guangzhou. Before his death, I rarely visited him. In early 1998, I went to Guangzhou to see him in hospital. After that trip, I made a sketch of him. Several months later, I turned the sketch into a pastel. One year later, I painted him with ink and colour. Compared with the sketch I did, his facial expression appears to be particularly nervous and confused in my painting of his portrait. If he had not looked like that, I would not have

8

After painting old people for nearly two years, Fong So wrote in his notes, before his first exhibition, what he felt about his subject.

October 20, 2000

The printer sent the colour proof of the exhibition catalogue today. Of the forty images, more than half were old people. I am sure people will ask me why I paint so many old people and what I feel about them.

Two years ago, when I first started to draw old people, I was mainly fascinated by the landscape of their faces and, quite often, the deformity of their bodies. The old woman feeding the street cats is a typical example. She is hunch-backed. I saw her very often when I spent my days in the Western district. She impressed me so much

people's home. It was a paradise compared with the old people's homes in Hong Kong: each resident had a spacious room with a spectacular view of the Arctic Sea.

'In the past old people used to tell stories in winter and children used to listen to them. Now children spend their time watching television. Our society is changing too fast, there's no ground for old people to stand on. It's difficult for their children to take care of them... It's impossible for me to live with my mother-in-law,' the manager told me. Her own mother-in-law, who had three sons, also lived in that old people's home. 'In the old people's home, the residents have all they need but they are not happy.'

you're the one who pays,' Fong So said. 'I won't encourage you to spend time with them any more. You won't make them happy.'

'Can I make anyone happy? The only thing I know is that I will be happy only if I am determined to look for happiness by myself.'

I looked at the photos of the old women in the former Soviet Union. There were so many widows, created by wars and dictators. There were always old women selling eggs and potatoes in the bitter cold at the railway stations along the Trans-Siberian railway. In big cities like Moscow, they usually sat idly in the open, very much like many of the old people in Hong Kong, as if there was no other place for them. Fong So told me that once, on his way to a bus terminal near my parents' flat, he saw my father sitting in a small open space under a huge flyover, along with other old people, doing nothing. Coming from a farming village, my father has never got used to the small flat he has been living in all these years and likes to stay outdoors.

The place where I took a lot of photos of old people was Greenland, a Danish colony. In Upernavik, a city north of the Arctic Circle where most of the Inuit population were still hunters, I stayed with a woman, half Danish and half Greenlander, who managed the old

have taken in the past ten years. One of them was taken on the day of the handover of Macau when I happened to walk past a crowd while the lowering of the Portuguese flag was being broadcast live. Many people were watching the television, among them an old man whose expression I could not forget. Perhaps he had come to Macau as a refugee and suddenly found that he was back in China again. When I saw that photo, I thought of my parents who had stayed in Macau for a while in the fifties.

'When we go to Macau again, perhaps I can invite my parents to go with us,' I said to Fong So.

'Are you sure?' Fong So asked.

'Didn't you encourage me to be kind to my parents?'

'Your parents are much more easy-going when they're with your younger brother, but with you... I won't encourage you to spend time with them any more. I thought my family was problematic enough, I could not imagine yours could be worse. One of the reasons that your parents dislike you so much, I think, is that you don't eat the food they eat.'

'You think that's the reason?' I laughed. 'But it's true that I was not enthusiastic about food, especially meat, even when I was small.'

'They don't let you have the food you need, even if

time,' said my mother. 'If there were no professional gamblers in a village, the village would be very poor.'

'Yes, in my village, there were gambling houses and places selling opium. That was why my village was rich,' my father said.

'You know, your grandmother's shop, the one your great-grandfather gave your grandmother when she got married, was rented out. The ground floor was a gambling house and the first floor was a place selling opium. They used to pay rent every day, not every month. At that time, only that kind of business could survive,' my mother said.

'How about after you came to Hong Kong, what do you want me to write about?'

'There's nothing worth writing about,' my father said.

'And you?' I asked my mother.

'There's nothing worth writing about, ' my mother said.

I looked around. The headline in the newspaper on that day, October 15, 2000, was about the past: the Premier of China was visiting Japan and the TV audience there had asked him why the Chinese endlessly asked the Japanese to make a proper apology and pay compensation.

After the tea, I looked at the photos of old people I

was under pressure and there were daily rumours that it would be devalued.

When the waitress was making the table next to us ready for a new customer, she asked him, 'should I buy some shares in the stock market tomorrow?'

'Yes, buy more in the morning, the market will go up at least five hundred points tomorrow,' the customer said to her.

'You should also write about your grandfather,' my father said after taking another meat dish. 'Your grandfather used to work in a gambling house. He was the banker of the game because he was well known for his honesty. Also he kept calm, no matter how big the bets were. Whenever he won some money, he always gave his children dumplings as a treat. I was very happy if I had dumplings to eat when I was young. But when you were young, even if I wanted to take you to a teahouse to have dim sum, you refused to go... In my *xiangxia*, there were professional gamblers... '

It was true that I was not enthusiastic about those treats my parents gave us after they had won money in mahjong or horseracing. It was because when my parents lost money, the children were often accused of having done or said unlucky things.

'There were professional gamblers everywhere at that

percent of the local population had tried to buy the shares.

The chandelier in the restaurant made me think of the Sunday dinners my parents used to hold and those uncles whose families were on the mainland. In my father's *xiangxia*, I met one of them. He had gone back there to live, after he retired, like my old uncle. I had met another recently in Hong Kong and he told me that he would never consider living in his *xiangxia* because his friend had died during a minor operation in a hospital on the mainland and he did not trust the hospitals there.

The old man sitting on the table next to ours was leaving, he had been sitting there alone for a long time. He was wearing a pair of old glasses and looked bewildered. He reminded me of the old man in a photo I took in the eastern part of Germany in mid 1990, shortly after the West German mark become the official currency. That old man was trying to cross the road but could not, as if the road had become, all of a sudden, too busy and difficult for him. Then I remembered my mother telling me how unstable the currency was on the mainland before 1949. 'What was worth a bag of rice in the morning could be worth only half a bag in the afternoon.' My mother said that after the handover of Hong Kong in 1997, when the Hong Kong dollar

vegetable do you want?' Fong So asked me all of a sudden.

'No. No. Eat vegetables in an expensive restaurant like this? How ridiculous! For a few dollars, we can buy a big bag in the market! Tens of dollars for a dish here... ' my father objected angrily.

'Get a dish of vegetables,' Fong So looked at me. 'You have nothing to eat. All the dishes we have ordered are meat dishes...'

'You're hopeless! You don't eat meat!' my father shouted at me. 'What's the point of being a vegetarian? You are useless! Useless! You don't eat meat, how stupid...'

'OKOK, don't order any vegetables,' I said to Fong So.

'But you haven't eaten anything...' Fong So was still trying to attract the attention of the woman serving vegetables.

'Ordering vegetable dishes in a restaurant like this! How stupid!'

'Forget the vegetables, Fong So... Get another meat dish...' I said.

My father started talking about the allocation of the shares of the newly privatised Mass Transit Railway. That had been the talk of the town and nearly eight

suddenly appeared. They probably thought that we were trying to destroy the railway and they chased us. We jumped into a fish pond. They used a speedboat to go after us. That was the most dangerous moment in my life... Normally the Japanese soldiers were nice to the children in the village. When they were on a train, they threw those one-cent coins into fish ponds. Sometimes they threw bread into the ponds as well. Many children in the village, including me, would jump into the fish ponds to get those coins and the bread...'

'Only people in your village would take things thrown away by the Japanese soldiers!' my mother interrupted. 'The people in our village never took anything! The Japanese always threw rice out but no one in our village took it. They cooked wheat with rice. Strange! We only ate our own food... We never took any food from the Japanese...' she said proudly. My mother has a special kind of sentiment towards China. Twenty years ago, when I was travelling in Nanjing in Central China, I spent all the money she had given me on an expensive antique inkstone. I thought she would scold me when she heard what I had done. But she did not. She just held the inkstone in her hand and said there were many good things in China and we should try to keep them.

'The vegetable trolley is coming, what kind of

you?' I asked.

'I haven't finished talking about *xiangxia* yet...' he recited the couplet again.

Knowing that he would go on to talk about his *xiangxia* for some time, I turned to my mother.

'What kind of child was I?'

'You?' She said with a scornful smile. 'If you saw a chair was in your way, you didn't even bother to push it away, you just went round it...You just read your books.'

'I remembered that you used to say to me, nearly everyday, "what use are you? You don't teach your younger brothers! What's the point of you getting good results? You are useless! You are selfish!"'

'Of course you were useless! You didn't teach your younger brothers!' my mother said angrily. Then she turned to Fong So and said, 'can you imagine what she said to me? "I study on my own and they should study by themselves. They should pay attention during lessons..."'

'What else do you want me to write about?' I turned to my father again.

'Once, during the Japanese invasion, your uncles and I wanted to visit a place near the railway. At that time, the Japanese soldiers occupied the big houses near the railway. When we were there, the Japanese soldiers

out, so they took my grandfather instead. My grandma was shot by the bandits. She tried to stop them from burning her silk. My grandparents used to have a small silk factory. She bled to death.'

'Do you think that's why you're always afraid when you are alone?' I asked my mother seriously.

'No. I've never thought about it. Perhaps...Yes, perhaps that's why... But also because of the bombing during the Japanese invasion,' my mother said after a while. 'My father used to do business in Shanghai until the Japanese dropped a bomb right next to his shoe shop. He had a terrible shock. He came back to our village and died a few months later.'

I turned to my father. 'What do you want me to write about if I want to write about you?'

'Of course you must write about my *xiangxia*,' my father said proudly. 'Listen. We had young soldiers even before the Japanese invasion, can you imagine? One of my uncles was a graduate of the Huangpu Military Academy, the top military academy in China at that time. But he didn't like the war so he went back to his home village and gave military training to the boys there... You'd better record the couplets in our home village as well,' he recited the couplet.

'How about you? What do you want me to write about

'A hundred thousand Hong Kong dollars? That was a huge amount of money in the thirties. How come your mother had so much money?'

'Perhaps less, I'm not that sure. I was just a few years old. But my mother's family was very rich. They had a wholesale business in Guangzhou, selling peanut oil. The ransom was not just the money. The bandits also demanded more than a hundred pieces of men's underwear made in England, a famous brand called 555....'

'Of course 555! They were really popular and everybody wanted to have some. They could only be bought in special shops in Guangzhou. That was always part of a ransom at that time...' my father interrupted again.

'The bandits also wanted large cartons of a very popular brand of cigarette called... Black Cat? A carton had ten small packs... There were twenty cigarettes in a pack...'

'Twenty! No! No, at that time the packs were smaller, only ten cigarettes... Black Cat was not the most popular brand...' my father said.

'Your grandmother said, "how can I let them kill an old man?" So she paid. Also she believed that the bandits had come for my elder brother. But we happened to be

kidnapped and my mother was afraid that the bandits would come to take my elder brother as well...'

'Oh, kidnapping was very common at that time. One of your uncles narrowly escaped a kidnapping because the bandits knew that he was the only son in the family. That's why he came to live in my village...' my father interrupted.

'What happened to your grandfather?' I asked my mother.

'Ha, he was really funny! After living in South Africa for many years, he wasn't afraid of anything... He said to the bandits, "don't ill-treat me! I'm sure my sons and daughters-in-law will pay the ransom. One of my daughters-in-law is very rich. I eat green bean soup everyday. Please prepare that for me. If you happen to go to a teahouse, bring along some dim sum for me. Take good care of me. If I die, you won't get any money." At that time, there were only women in the family. My mother was the one who negotiated with the bandits. My father was dead and my uncles were in South Africa. After talking with the bandits two or three times, my mother paid the ransom, with money from my maternal grandfather, something like a hundred thousand Hong Kong dollars. At that time the bandits wanted Hong Kong dollars and they called them Western dollars...'

7

I got interested in my mother's sense of insecurity when a friend told me that her own mother had become terribly nervous after her aunt suffered a fatal stroke during a burglary.

'Didn't you say that your house was looted when you were young? ' I asked my mother. I was having tea with her and my father in a Chinese restaurant on a bright autumn Sunday nearly a year after the trip to *xiangxia*. I had finished two essays about them and had got more interested in their stories.

'Oh, yes! Bandits looted the whole village! Rumour had it that some of the family were working for the bandits. The village was walled and had a drawbridge. It was not easy to break into... At that time my mother had taken us to my maternal grandfather's house.'

'Why?'

'Because my paternal grandfather had been

showed an old woman bending low on her zimmerframe, accompanied by a man and a woman, who did nothing to help. The second one, after my description of the nightmare, showed the huge backs of a man and a girl with a miniature image of the first study heading towards them.

'I like this one better,' she pointed at the second one and began to comment. 'The perspective is different. I wish I could have a dream that would help me to write.'

'For this one,' she pointed at the first one. 'I like the hands of the woman. They look mysterious. You know what's meant by body language. People's hands usually say something. Here, the man's hands are saying something too simple and too direct. Perhaps it helps if you learn some...'

'Hand signs,' I said.

'Yes.'

'Let's borrow a book about them from the university library the next time we go there.'

with anger, she would not listen any more; and I keep quiet, hearing without listening.

'I'd better save my breath and get some sleep.' She ended her monologue and went to bed.

I slept late that night. Before going to bed, I tore up some waste paper.

Then I had a nightmare. I shouted aloud in my dream and woke up in terror.

'What's wrong?' Hark asked.

'A dream,' I said.

'What did you dream about?'

'Someone snatched one of my sketches and it got torn.'

'What did it look like?'

'There were three figures in it. Two filled up nearly all the space with their backs.'

'Can you draw it?'

'Yes, in the morning.'

'You are under pressure,' she sighed. 'Perhaps I should make fewer comments about your work and make you feel less stressed.'

She likes to comment on everything, especially on works of art. I let her play the role of a critic. Sometimes her remarks can be quite inspiring.

The next morning, I made two studies. The first one

normally used but on a four-legged supporting device, which I had never seen her use before. One of her daughters-in-law moved ahead to the few steps of the hallway to clear the way for her.

'How is Ah-po (old grandma)?' I asked the young woman.

'Her legs hurt,' she replied, with her eyes fixed on the old woman and the escorting team advancing inch by inch at the other end of the hallway. 'We are taking her to hospital.'

'Is the ambulance coming?' I asked.

'We are going in our own car,' she said.

'Is there any way I can help?'

'No, thanks.'

So I stepped aside and watched them. I watched the way they moved slowly and with great difficulty down the few steps at the end of the hallway.

When I went up, Hark showered me with reproaches.

'Help? Use your common sense. You shouldn't do anything: there's no way to help. They should call an ambulance. She had a stroke before...'

She continued with her tirade, giving me no chance to say anything about what really happened when I was down there.

Sometimes she is like this: whenever she is filled

Kong, with my mother. I'll tell you what happened later.'

That was a short trip - only two days! Something must have gone wrong.

'Yes, something went very wrong,' she said later. 'My parents fought all the way. They argued a lot. They couldn't agree about anything. They argued until they both had sore throats. My mother was particularly difficult. She made everybody unhappy. Perhaps she didn't feel well. Yesterday, when we all got into a car to go somewhere, nobody had any idea where to go. The driver asked my father. My father turned to my mother, but she just said, "I don't want to go anywhere. I want to go back to Hong Kong." So I took her out to Guangzhou this morning and came back with her.'

'Did you get anything to write about?' I asked.

'A bit,' she said. 'I was patient enough this time.'

January 19, 2000

The day before yesterday I went to take the garbage out and returned to see something quite unusual. The old woman who lives in the next house, escorted by her sons and daughters-in-law, was struggling to go somewhere. She moved slowly, not on the stick she

She was born in Hong Kong. She never considered her father's home village her own. She knows nobody there, but her father, who is a frequent visitor to his home village, is quite popular there.

The ancestral hall is being reconstructed and her father, being one of the few villagers who had two sons and a grandson, was very eager to go. That kind of mentality is disliked most by Hark.

'I'll go for a few days,' said Hark. 'I might come back very soon, if I can't stand them.'

She took the early train yesterday. I started to work shortly after seeing her off. I carved the two largest seal stones again, removing the old carving marks first and making a second attempt. The forty Chinese characters took me almost a full day. Then I spent hours making alterations and amendments. When I went to bed, it was already two o'clock.

I have not worked such long hours for some time. Hark always tells me not to overwork. She always bans me from working too hard.

'Take a rest. Don't work like a machine. Think more.'

December 28, 1999

'I'm back,' Hark said over the phone. 'I'm now in Hong

when he learned that my uncle (my mother's elder brother) had been in Burma for more than twenty years.

'My uncle left Burma in 1966,' I said. 'Then he stayed in Macau for a year in a place near the Red Market.'

'The Red Market!' he exclaimed, 'it's nearby.'

He told us his own story about the old days in Burma during the Japanese occupation, the post-war period, and the drastic changes brought about by the Burmese government under the influence of the communist experiment in mainland China.

Uncle Burmese and the restaurant owner were very keen to talk about Burma. They talked a lot about visiting Burma. 'My children are not interested in Burma at all,' said Uncle Burmese. 'They were born in Macau.'

December 27, 1999

Hark went with her parents to their home village in China. She said she was merely going to see what could be included in her book.

She always has trouble with her parents. They argue a lot when they are together. If it was not for her book, she would hardly think of joining her parents on a trip to her father's home village.

with all sorts of curious things, she said, 'I bought all these for them, and paid for them myself.'

When asked whether she liked Macau, she said: 'I am not going to die here. I will go back to Timor and die there.'

'Uncle Burmese' is the person we have to see again in Macau. We met him in a cheap restaurant near a roundabout known as 'Three Lamps' when we went there to look for people from Burma. The owner of the restaurant was also Burmese Chinese. From the sixties onward, a lot of ethnic Chinese left Burma because of its deteriorating economic and political situation. At that time, the Burmese government tried to follow mainland China on the road to socialism. The policy of collectivism was adopted. Private property was forfeited. The Chinese, who were mostly engaged in business, were robbed of their hard-earned wealth. They were declared stateless and made to leave. Many of them went to Macau.

Uncle Burmese came to Macau in 1967; and the owner of the restaurant came in the early seventies. Like other Burmese Chinese, they settled down in the area of 'Three Lamps'. Until now, according to them, there are 'tens of thousands' of Burmese Chinese in Macau.

Uncle Burmese treated Hark and me as good friends

trip to Macau. I did not expect to go to Macau so often, but I knew Hark wanted to go again before Macau's handover on December 20.

She said she did not like Macau. 'I keep going back mainly for the book which I am writing,' she said.

When we were there last month, we met people from other places. 'Their stories will become part of my book,' said Hark. 'I have to talk to some of them again.'

Among those people was a 'fat aunt' in the refugee centre. She is Timorese Chinese and she said she went to the centre to see and help the refugees almost everyday. Speaking the native dialect of the Timorese, she was very popular among the refugees. She brought all sorts of Chinese medicine believed to be effective for sore throats, coughs, headaches, stomach aches and so on, to them. And they trusted her.

'My husband was a Chinese physician,' she said. She told us she was from a family of merchants doing business in Timor, Macau, and other parts of South East Asia. She went to the mainland for higher education in the late fifties or early sixties but quickly left because she 'found the situation there totally unbearable'. So she ended up living in Macau.

'I like Timorese people. I feel I am one of them. I help them for nothing.' Showing us a big bag stuffed

tourists from Hong Kong go to gamble and have fun. There we found a restaurant operating around the clock. The corridor outside the restaurant provided a disturbing scene. We could see through the window that dozens of young women were walking slowly to and fro. They were obviously those generally referred to as 'girls from the north' by the people of Hong Kong. They came from the mainland and tried to earn some money from those men who were willing to pay for that sort of fun.

'We are told that the Portuguese government has been making efforts to clean up Macau before the handover,' I said. 'I didn't think they wanted those girls to be seen. And now, they are still here.'

'That's Macau,' said Hark. 'Have you thought about painting a scene like that?'

'It will be challenging. I'll think about it.'

After our late-night snack, we walked up to the square in front of the Leal Senado. We sat on a long bench waiting for daybreak. It was icy cold. Hark lent against my back to keep warm. And she fell asleep. I struggled hard to withstand the cold air and to keep my eyes open.

December 1, 1999

I went out to the city to book a hotel room for another

said half jokingly, 'get rich quickly. We'll have a coffee plantation in East Timor. You know that I am a coffee drinker.'

The refugees going back to East Timor would board an early plane at seven the next morning. Maria looked sleepy but she talked and talked with Hark until well after midnight. Then came Maria's father-in-law, a retired civil servant and an ex-member of the former legislature of East Timor during the Indonesian reign.

He seemed to be a prominent figure among the refugees. We talked to him when we arrived at the refugee centre. By the time we talked to Maria, he was being interviewed on TV. He thought we were also journalists so he came over.

Hark did not like talking to him. She liked Maria much more so she left the old man to me. The old man talked a lot until he was very tired. We told him to get some sleep.

We left the refugee centre at three.

'Where can we go?' I asked. 'We haven't booked a hotel room.'

'Are you hungry?' asked Hark. 'Let's take a taxi and go somewhere to have a late night snack.'

The taxi driver said there were many places where we could eat. However we went to a hotel where many

them go as soon as possible - definitely before December 20, the day of the handover of Macau to China after four hundred years of Portuguese occupation.

'I want to write about the people of East Timor,' said Hark. 'I like them. They were very kind. Some day in future, I'll own a coffee plantation in East Timor and create jobs for people there.'

She decided to stay with the refugees for their last night in Macau so we took the ferry in the late afternoon and arrived in the early evening.

We arrived at the refugee centre at nine and were introduced to a young woman, Maria, who spoke English quite well. She was thirty-three, the mother of a small daughter. She used to teach botany or agriculture at the university of East Timor. While many young East Timor refugees opted to go to Portugal, her plan was to return to East Timor with her husband to resume their normal life.

'I'll start with some agricultural work,' she said. 'I don't know when the university will open again.'

Hark talked with Maria. She even asked her how much she would have to invest for a coffee plantation of one hundred trees.

'About one thousand US dollars,' answered Maria.

'Not much,' smiled Hark. She then turned to me and

bit. To the observer, only the final product is visible, but it is always the result of numerous hard struggles by the artist.

November 19, 1999

The East Timorese refugees are leaving Macau. The last time when we visited them in the refugee centre, they said they would go on November 20. Now they had to go two days earlier.

Hark had a plan to see the refugees off. She had been to East Timor last year, shortly after Suharto stepped down after being Indonesian president for more than thirty years. At that time, East Timor was occupied by Indonesia. Only recently, the people of East Timor opted for independence in a referendum. Violence broke out immediately and the pro-Indonesian militia, generally believed to be supported by the Indonesian army, launched attacks on civilians. The situation turned so bad that many Timorese fled abroad. More than one hundred of them managed to go to Macau and were received by the Portuguese government. They were there waiting to go home or to Portugal. Of course, the Portuguese government would very much like to see

one. I tried it on Thursday, Friday and Saturday and failed. I then took a break on Sunday to do some other sketches, in the hope that those sketches would help me to improve the ritual scene. I got the finished one yesterday and coloured it only this morning.

The brushwork is based on a study I did in Third Street. The study is not full size. It shows only the face and the hands of an old woman making the offering. In the study, the old woman is accompanied by a young man. When this scene is turned into a painting, it shows the old woman life-size, and the accompanying young man is turned into an old man.

The study is a street scene. Just like all other pastels I did, I drew it with the aid of my sketches. Of course, it would be better if I drew with models. Can I get anyone to pose for me? I doubt it. Photos can help, but only to a certain extent.

I have to do a lot of other studies when I produce a painting from a sketch. It takes only a short while to make a sketch; and it does not take much time to do the painting, but it takes a lot of time to make the studies in between. The process is somewhat like running up the slope and going down again. To make a sketch is the first few steps of going uphill. To do the painting is the final stage of going downhill. In between is the difficult

By night time, it was eighty per cent dry. I hung it on a panel, side by side with the six-foot version I had done before. It is useful to do comparisons in this way. It helps me to make improvements.

When I compared the two works, the later one was obviously better than the earlier version in many ways. The brushstrokes were simpler; the colour brighter and cleaner; the facial expression of the old woman looks more complicated; the black cat looks less comic but more curious.

'That's the face of quite a difficult old woman,' Hark pointed at the later version. 'The earlier one just looks lonely. You know, a lot of old people are lonely not simply because the younger generation don't care about them. Sometimes they are so stubborn and difficult that they turn people away from them. Our landlords' old mother is a typical example. She is lonely. But sometimes I don't have any sympathy for her. She is a very difficult person. It's necessary to show the subtlety of real life nowadays in a modern painting. That's why I think the later attempt is better than the earlier one.'

September 7, 1999

The scene of the ritual offering proved to be a difficult

As night fell, I could see bluish light beams coming out through the closed window of the old woman's house. She must have been watching TV for some time.

Suddenly, I thought I could paint the scene of an old woman watching TV alone. I made a sketch of the imagined scene the next day, adding a cat to highlight the old woman's loneliness.

On the coming three days, I tried to turn it into a painting. It would be a subtle image of life in our time. Also, it would be interesting because I could make it as colourful as I liked and produce something not seen before in any Chinese painting.

Today, at the third attempt, I almost finished it.

'Are you happy with it?' Hark asked.

'No,' I said. 'It isn't concentrated enough. I think I should reduce it down and fit it on to the five-foot paper. Also, a lot of brushstrokes should be reduced to the simplest form.'

August 21, 1999

Today I resumed my work on the scene of the TV addict. I managed to finish it in the late afternoon, before the weather turned bad.

August 19, 1999

Three days ago, in the early evening, I went to the rooftop to get some air after staying in the house on a hot day. There were two outdoor TV antennas and a wok dish for satellite TV.

Such a scene is quite common in the village. I have a TV set. For many years, I have seldom watched TV. After moving into the village, I connected the TV set to an outdoor antenna, but it did not work. Neither Hark nor I are TV addicts. We are even happy to go without TV. We therefore did nothing to the antenna and hung a painting of calla lilies on the TV screen.

I looked at the rooftop of my landlords' elderly mother's old house next door. I saw two outdoor TV antennas. The old woman is perhaps a real TV addict. She has two TV sets, one in her bedroom on the first floor, another one in the living room on the ground floor. She shuts herself inside and watches TV every evening.

Shortly after I moved into the village, I was once 'invited' or 'summoned' by her to show her how to switch her bedroom TV on because the remote control did not work and her sons were not around. It is understandable that, for a partly paralysed old person like her, watching TV is the only entertainment.

August 7, 1999

I had attempted the grandma and the grandson two or three times before I moved to the village house. The original work was a pastel study inspired by a scene I saw in Tai Po, a new town in the New Territories, last winter. What I saw was an old woman walking on her stick with an obviously retarded boy accompanying her. The woman was short and thin; but the boy was relatively large. The pastel work shows the upper part of the two figures. When I first made a painting, I simply followed the original sketch and the overall effect was no good.

This time, I decided to alter the study and paint a full-length portrait of the grandma and her grandson. I attempted it with six-foot paper, making it life size.

The first attempt in ink was not well executed. No colour was applied to it.

On the next day, I tried again, starting with an improved pencil sketch. I soon found that this attempt worked. I added colour to it.

The finished work has some sort of subtlety. It appears the boy is trying to help his grandma, but one cannot say for sure which one of them is supporting which.

Hark's friend came with her husband and her two kids on Saturday evening.

'See, the mother cat is very tired,' Hark's friend told her two sons, 'but she is nursing her kittens all the time.'

On the next day, another friend of Hark said something similar to her son while they were watching the mother cat and her little kittens.

August 3, 1999

Today I painted an old woman collecting empty soft drink cans, based on a study I did several months ago. The study in pastel shows an old woman scavenging in the rubbish. I changed it to a scene of collecting empty soft drink cans.

Many old people in Hong Kong spend their days collecting waste to earn a few extra dollars. I have no idea how much they earn. I guess it must be very little.

Hark and I once helped a hunch-backed old woman pull two cartons of waste paper up the steep street when we were still staying near Centre Street. The old woman was thin and weak. She appreciated our help. I later made a sketch of her and made a painting from the sketch.

Within half an hour, five small creatures had emerged. When I looked inside, four were clinging to their mother's nipples and sucking milk.

'I think the fifth one won't make it. It's not moving.' I heard one of the women say.

After the party Hark talked to the wife of the elder brother who was very friendly. 'One of our neighbours told me she had seen the cat with a big belly before,' she said, 'but no kittens afterwards.'

'My old mother-in-law got rid of the kittens,' she said. 'She always does something like that.'

The next morning, Hark and I woke up at six and went down to see the mother cat and her kittens. We were there just one minute before the old woman came out of her old house.

We felt a little nervous when we saw the old woman walk up to the kennel and look inside. It was difficult to predict what she would do.

'Oi?' She talked to us after murmuring something in a dialect we did not understand.

'Oi!' Hark replied loudly, not knowing exactly what 'oi' meant. It was only later that we learnt that 'oi' meant 'I'll take it.'

The old woman, while still muttering, walked away slowly on her stick.

I always treat the animals with tasty snacks. They have come to like us and they come to greet us every time we open our door.

Last Friday evening, when we were having a barbecue party in the front yard below our flat, the female cat, the one with the elegant black coat, gave birth to five small kittens. The party was some sort of family gathering as the eldest brother of the old woman was back in Hong Kong with his wife and his daughter. Hark and I were invited after having our evening walk.

The black cat had been pregnant for some time. Having no better shelter around, she adopted the empty kennel in the front yard of the old house as her maternity ward. I cut a carton box and filled it with a soft towel to prepare a nursery. She seemed to be happy with the nursery. The dog appeared to be happy to let the cat use the empty kennel.

'Look,' one of the women suddenly squealed over the wine and barbecue meat. 'The cat is giving birth,' she pointed at the kennel.

Several women gathered around the kennel and looked inside with great interest.

'Ooh, a second one!' they exclaimed after several minutes.

'The third!'

seldom gives any attention to the animals. She seldom feeds them. The job of feeding the three animals is left to her sons.

She has four sons. The eldest and the second son work in England, the third and the fourth stay in Hong Kong. She lives alone in a neglected old house while her two sons live with their own families in new houses nearby, built on the land allotted to the male descendants of the original inhabitants of the New Territories. The new houses are three-storey structures so the owners can rent one or two storeys out to earn some extra income.

We rent a first floor flat in the new house just next to the old mother's house. The actual owner of the flat is the second one of the four brothers. Since he is not in Hong Kong, his younger brothers, the third and the fourth, act on his behalf as the landlords.

The old mother had a stroke some years ago. She became partially paralysed and could not talk or walk properly. She cannot cook for herself. So she cannot feed her dog and cats. Her sons and daughters-in-law feed the animals with the leftovers from their dining table. Usually it is rice or old boiled chicken after making soup. The animals are obviously not very interested in the tasteless carcasses of the boiled chickens. Hark and

Another example is the half-blind old woman. She looks so miserable.

Why? How come I paint sad people better? Was my life miserable in the past? Or, is it, as Hark says, that ever since my childhood I have encountered too many miserable people and unhappy events?

'It's something deep-rooted in your subconscious. Why don't you try to make use of it? Try to paint a whole series of miserable people,' she said, 'and give the series the title *Les Miserables*.'

That is a good idea, I thought, but I still need to learn to paint happy faces. To use the painting of the fat and thin women as an example: the thin woman will look even more miserable if she is placed next to a cheerful fat woman. I have to make more observations and sketches from life.

'You know what sort of city Hong Kong is,' I said to Hark. 'There are a lot of fat people around, but few of them are cheerful.'

'No,' she replied, 'there are not many in the city.'

July 25, 1999

Our landlord's mother keeps a dog and two cats. She

to pursue.'

I was speechless after hearing his comment. I did not know what to say. Perhaps I should have asked him if he also had something to pursue.

July 9, 1999

I forget how many times I have repainted the scene of two old women: one fat and one thin. It could be the sixth or seventh time that I attempted it again yesterday, unsuccessfully.

I wanted the fat woman, who is comforting the thin one in my painting, to look cheerful, but I could not get what I wanted. The thin woman, who looks miserable in my painting, is always under control. I was able to achieve what I wanted with her very easily.

It seems that I am much better at painting miserable people, I thought.

I had another look at several works that I considered my final versions. None of the faces looked happy.

The painting of an old woman eating a piece of sandwich is a vivid example. The woman has a very stern look. She is obviously unhappy with the tasteless sandwich.

something more than knowledge from books. We believed that something should be done to change society and that we could make change.

Twenty-five years after, we found that we ourselves had changed a lot.

The friend, whose mother died in an old people's home in Hong Kong, is working in the United States. He has been there for eighteen years. His mother once went to the States to stay with him but found life in a small city too lonely. She eventually returned to Hong Kong and went into an old people's home.

For some years, that friend was quite enthusiastic about cultural exchange with mainland China. He used to keep up to date about Hong Kong and China through the monthly magazine, *The Nineties*. 'I haven't read anything about Hong Kong since the closure of *The Nineties*,' he said.

He knew why *The Nineties* had closed down. The others also knew why. They did not talk about me much during the gathering in the funeral parlour. Most of the time they talked about their jobs, their lives and their children. I could share very little of their conversation.

Then one of them turned to me and asked how I was doing. 'Now that you are painting. You are working on something different. It seems you still have something

feeding the street cat. Judging from the questions they asked, they appeared to be art lovers.

In the evening, Hark treated her parents to a seafood meal and then a cruise in a small boat. After the outing, they came to our flat to have tea and wine. They enjoyed this evening's programme. They left well after midnight.

Hark was also in a good mood. 'I have been kind to a couple of foreigners, I think I should be kind to my parents. The old couple from Belgium walked all day today. I said to them that they travelled like young people. They said their sons and daughters did not travel like that and their grandchildren were very fragile, because their parents took care of them as if they were made of sugar.'

June 11, 1999

Funeral services sometimes provide opportunities for old friends to see each other.

Last Sunday, I attended the funeral service of the mother of a university friend. On that occasion, I met some other friends.

We had taken part in the student movement of the early seventies. We were all idealists, pursuing

hold colour very well.

May 21, 1999

After visiting Sheung Yiu Museum which was actually a row of old village houses, Hark and I went for a walk from Pak Tam Chung to the High Island Reservoir. Then we went to Sai Kung town by bus.

On our way, we met two foreigners - an old couple - three times. Finally, when we bumped into them again in a cafe, we decided to talk to them. They were from Belgium. They wanted to go around and see old Hong Kong. They were trying to look for the Sheung Yiu Museum but could not find it. We nearly missed it as well because the directions were unclear.

Hark was planning to visit three old places on the next day. The foreign couple wanted to join her. So Hark invited them to come to our flat early next morning.

Today, they arrived early. We treated them with fresh soy milk. They insisted on seeing some of my works. I showed them some old works that were hanging on the wall.

When they asked for more, I showed them two recent ones - the woman eating a sandwich and the old woman

March 12, 1999

The hunch-backed woman usually feeds the street cats late in the evening. In my pastel drawing, the cat-feeding scene is a night scene.

Last month, when I first attempted to do a painting of the pastel study, I left the background blank. With the white background, no one could say if it was day or night.

Over the past month, I have repeated it several times, mainly to refine the brushstrokes. In the previous attempts, I did nothing to the background. The final one, I decided, would definitely be a night scene.

Today, I painted it again.

'It's time to do something to the background,' I thought. So I dyed it first with light black ink and then with dark blue. I also added a beam of yellow in the middle. I used a piece of Korean paper as the ground sheet. *Xuan* paper, the paper used for Chinese painting, is good for brushwork, but not so good for dyeing.

At night, when I started to write my notes, the painting was still wet. On such a wet spring day, it might take five hours for the painting to dry. I had a feeling that I would get the desired effect even before it was completely dry because the old five-foot paper could

usually cramped. Their family members are out during the day, and no one is there to take care of them.

Looking at the old people sitting listlessly in the park, I felt sorry for them.

That evening, I was told about a man who was about to retire. Whenever he walked in the park and saw some old people there with absolutely nothing to do, he said to himself: 'I'll join you very soon.' He said there was nothing else for the old people in Hong Kong, they only had a park to sit in.

January 15, 1999

Yesterday morning, when I was having tea in a Chinese restaurant, some headlines in the newspaper caught my attention.

1. Currency devaluation in Brazil triggers off drastic fall of all major stock markets around the world. Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index dropped 772 points on Wednesday.

2. Because of the cold weather, nine elderly people died. A new cold front is expected and the icy weather will continue.

rather than go out and shiver in the cold air. To my surprise, I could still see more than a dozen. After walking around the small park for a while, I began to understand why those old people were there, even on such a cold day. It was because they had nothing to do and nowhere to go.

That small park there is not really a nice place. It is in a crowded district, surrounded by buildings. There are several privately owned old people's homes nearby. A care centre for the elderly, run by a charity organisation, is only two blocks away. One block further on, there is a hospital. To make matters worse, there are several shops selling coffins and other ritual paraphernalia on the other side of the road, directly opposite the small park.

In a densely populated city like Hong Kong, the old people's homes, especially those that are privately run, can hardly be pleasant. I visited one once, it was crowded and soulless. The interior looked like an army barracks. There were twenty or thirty beds, all in a single room. The beds were almost the only facilities. The old people living there had nothing to do. They were encouraged or forced to go out in the daytime, if they could walk.

The conditions for old people living with their families are sometimes worse. Their living space is

almost impossible to imagine,' she said.

For the rest of the day, I worked hard on it with pencil and paper. I made everything look realistic, except that I drew the couple somewhat older.

After looking at the drawing, Hark said I should make the mirror round rather than rectangular.

'The round shape is symbolic,' she said.

I took her advice. The sketch looked better.

I believe there is something in common between literature and visual art. Both of them are a mirror of life, but one can always enrich what one writes or what one paints by adding in something that is not so real. And eventually, as Hark puts it, 'you will create something that's even more real than real life.'

December 15, 1998

It suddenly turned cold yesterday, after the rain. A rapid change of the weather like this is always dangerous for the very old. I went out this morning in the chilly wind to see how the old people were.

I remembered the small park in Hollywood Road, where I saw a lot of old people on a warm Sunday afternoon. I thought most old people would stay indoors

December 14, 1998

I try to find inspiration for my paintings in real life.

Yesterday I drew an old man sitting in a wheelchair. I struggled for two hours with it and did not like the result. I wanted to draw an old man in poor health but I failed.

I decided to go for a walk and look around. A walk like this is always a field trip. I am getting used to going out carrying a small note pad and a marker pen. When I see something interesting I am able to make a brief sketch of it.

In Gough Street, a street near Central, I saw a thin old man walking slowly with his head bent to his left side. He was so weak that he had difficulty even raising his eyes to watch where he was going. I made a simple sketch of his face. This sketch helped me a lot.

Early this morning, out of the kitchen window, I saw a moving scene. An old couple were standing on a small balcony. The old man was giving an old woman a haircut with a pair of scissors. She was holding a comb in her right hand and a mirror in her left. She was looking at the mirror with a soft smile.

I called Hark to come to the kitchen and have a look. She suggested that I draw it. 'You know, such a scene is

the local artists.'

He told me the yellow colour was from Cambodia. 'A friend of mine brought it to Hong Kong. It is not easy to get good quality *teng huang*. The producers always mix it with mud and sand.'

The shopkeeper came out with the piece of yellow. It was a little bit larger than my fist.

'You are not going to buy the whole piece, are you?' the old man asked me. I knew what he meant when he said that.

'No, no. Just a quarter,' I said

'Yes, leave some for the others,' he said. He rose from the mahjong table and said, 'let me do the cutting.'

I apologised for interrupting his game.

'Not at all,' he replied. 'Mahjong is only for fun. After all, it's Saturday afternoon.'

With the help of the shopkeeper, he did the cutting, using a knife and a hammer. After that, he told the shopkeeper to pack the yellow colour I needed in a small plastic bag. Then he said goodbye and went back to his mahjong table.

There was a small signboard for the shop outside the building. I followed the sign and managed to find the shop. When I got there, I found four men playing mahjong inside. A shopkeeper was standing next to the mahjong table, watching the game of four.

The shopkeeper showed me the colour I wanted. When I asked for *hua qing*, a blue colour called indigo, an old man, apparently the owner of the shop, spoke up from the table. 'We do have some, but not good quality,' he said. 'With the flooding in Central China over the past few years, we can hardly get hold of it. We don't want to sell poor quality colour to our customers.'

I told him I really needed some. He advised me to buy a little and try it out.

'Once we had some better quality *hua qing*. A painter sent someone to buy the lot whatever the price was.'

Then I asked for *teng huang*, a yellow colour called gamboge. The shopkeeper showed me some. I said I needed more, and better quality yellow if there was any. The old man told me that they still had a large piece. The shopkeeper went to the rear section of the shop to get that piece out to show me.

'Some time ago,' said the old man, 'a Korean came and offered to buy all the yellow colour.' With pride and dignity, he continued, 'I refused. I must keep some for

I am going to start later. So I went shopping today. Over the past month, after my trip to the United States and Mexico, I have been using pastel to make studies. That is the first step. The second is to turn some of the studies into paintings. The colours I use for Chinese painting are made in the traditional way. The trouble is, there is no guarantee of quality. What is worse, they are not easy to find. There are only two or three shops selling good art materials for Chinese painting. Chinese painting materials are vanishing from the market, and the shops selling them are also disappearing.

Thirty years ago, before I stopped painting, I bought supplies in several shops in Sheung Wan, a district west of Central. One of them had been in Central, but moved to Sheung Wan later.

To do the shopping this time, I decided to try Sheung Wan first. So I went to a shop which was once one of the largest and most prominent shops specialising in traditional art supplies. I just hoped it was still there.

There the shop was, at Sheung Wan, but it had moved from the ground floor to a small flat in a commercial and residential building nearby. It was quite disheartening to see a once large shop reduced to such a small one and forced to move to a place like that. It did not look as if it was doing very well.

finding something to do. They sell vegetables, fruit, and other small items. Some really old ones even collect waste paper and sell it to the recycling merchants. There is also a hunch-backed old woman, who feeds the street cats of the district every night. For some time, I have been trying to draw these from memory.

Early this year, I went to Guangzhou to see my old father. After leaving Guangzhou in 1962, I went back to visit him very rarely. A few months ago, I heard that he was in hospital and went to see him. He was so ill that he looked pale and yellow. He appeared to be somewhat nervous and confused when he saw me. At the age of eighty-six, his eyesight was not bad. Yet his eyes had already turned grey, and were bloodshot. I returned to Hong Kong the next day, after seeing him in the hospital once more. I had to meet the production deadline of *The Nineties Monthly*. On the way back to Hong Kong, I made a sketch of his facial expression. He died ten days after my visit.

December 12, 1998

I need some colours for the Chinese painting, which

6

Fong So has recorded his encounters with old people and how he tried to paint them in his notes.

December 11, 1998

I started to paint and draw a month ago. I have been drawing mainly old people.

Why do I draw old people?

There are lots of old people around us. The population of Hong Kong is ageing. In fact, the population of our world is also ageing.

I have spent most of the time over the past year in Centre Street, a steep old street in the Western district. Many old people live there. Most of them are lonely but hard-working people. It seems that they do not live with their children. Most try to keep themselves busy by

'Eat more,' my mother said.

'My appetite is not good.'

'Ask your daughter-in-law to make rice soup with these dried scallops. We brought them from Hong Kong. This bag is for you. This bag is for old uncle. It is tasty and appetizing.'

'Yes, thank you. You have a good heart...'

My mother told my old aunt again to take care of herself and patiently repeated what she had said. It was one of the rare moments that my mother was agreeable during the trip.

'You are patient with old people,' I said to her.

'This is the last time we will see each other,' my mother said. After that she started to complain about my father's *xiangxia* again and when she was asked where she would like to go, she said, 'I just want to go back to Hong Kong.'

A few hours later, I went back to Hong Kong with her. *Xiangxia* was a bit too much for me as well, in less than twenty-four hours, I had already had five big feasts.

extraordinary lucidity.

My old uncle died about ten days later. He had lived for almost a century. My father went to his funeral and described what had happened: a car from the funeral parlour in the nearest city sent a coffin into the village and picked up the body as well as the people who wanted to accompany the dead man. They went straight to the crematorium, where the body was immediately burned. The ashes in a small pot were taken back to the village cemetery for burial. There was a cemetery for those who did not want to be cremated, but it was just for residents of Hong Kong, Macau and overseas.

'Walk around a bit everyday,' my mother said to my old aunt after seeing my old uncle. I sat on a wooden chair near them and discovered that it had a special design: there were two nice, gentle curves on the surface of the seat so that the hips could rest comfortably. My old uncle was a carpenter before working as a cook in the shop owned by one of his half-brothers. He always lived in his place of work. He did not have a home in Hong Kong. During the ten years he was in *xiangxia*, he had lived alone until he was too old to take care of himself. He did not get on well with his wife.

'Yes, I can walk,' my old aunt said. 'But my hands keep shaking all the time. It started a few years ago.'

obviously in a good mood after enjoying the attention of all his relatives.

'You're mean. You left me alone...' My mother burst into tears.

My old uncle was lying in bed in his house when my parents and I went to see him the next day. His face was as dry as a desert landscape. He recognized our voices.

'You live in the UK,' he spoke clearly and gently, the way he did when he visited us thirty years before.

'No, I have come back. I live in Hong Kong now,' I said.

'Oh yes, you are a journalist.'

'Yes, you still remember,' I wanted to say I was no longer a journalist. But that was not important to him anymore.

'Oh, yes...'

My old uncle's eyes were wide open but he looked as if he could not see anything. On his face, he, like all his family, still bore the weathering, hardship and solitude that marked their ancestors from Shanxi, a poor northern province with infertile plateaux and yellow earth. The air of my old uncle's room smelt of the past. He talked more clearly than I expected. It was not a good sign. The Chinese believe that before someone passes away, they always have a few days of

small and lovely. The air was fresh. Now the village is situated next to a highway and there are factories everywhere. There are only small strips of fields left, rented to the workers from North China who have come to the south for a modest share of the fortune brought by the new open policy.

But I had to admit that it sounded like something I had said. When I was young, I had high expectations of everything. I asked a lot of myself, and of all the people around me. To my parents, who had to struggle to make ends meet, I must have been a difficult child.

We stayed until well after midnight.

Back in the flat, we found my mother sitting in the apartment alone instead of playing mahjong downstairs.

'You left me alone. You deliberately made me stay in this scary, empty flat,' she shouted at my father when she saw us.

'There's nothing to be afraid of; uncle and aunt are sleeping downstairs,' I said.

'They're asleep. They don't care about me,' my mother looked really scared. It was clear that she did not feel secure in my father's *xiangxia*.

'How could I have known that the game would end so early? I thought you were going to play until early in the morning!' my father tried to explain. He was

they knew that he was in the restaurant. My father was full of energy, talking and laughing. He went around happily, almost like a kid. Perhaps one of the reasons he likes to go back to his home village is that he wants to relive his childhood: a childhood robbed by war. He had probably not really outgrown the child in him when he went to Guangzhou to earn a living as an apprentice for tailors, at the age of seventeen. Probably he was not ready to support a family when he became a father.

During the tea, a cousin asked me, 'when are you going to buy a piece of land here?'

'Why should I?'

'Don't you remember? Last time you came back, you pointed at a large piece of green field with a few large fish ponds and said, "one day I will buy up all this land and build a house in the middle of it." I remember that clearly because I was so surprised.'

'Did I say that? Now I have no money.'

'The land here is not expensive, much cheaper than in Hong Kong,' my cousin said.

'But it's still too expensive for me.'

Honestly I cannot remember making such an arrogant remark. The time my cousin referred to was nearly twenty years ago and at that time the village was a difference space: it was green and the brick houses were

My mother's family lost their fortune in the Japanese invasion. She said she married my father because he was the only one who turned up at my maternal grandmother's funeral, which was just days before Lunar New Year.

The ancestral hall had not been restored in the old style. The wooden boards with the names of my ancestors, which had been burnt down during the Cultural Revolution, had not been replaced. A big 'Shou', meaning longevity, was put in its place. The surname in front of the hall was a computer-printout instead of Chinese calligraphy. A fellow villager told me that a village nearby, which had kept their hall in the old style, had been criticized by officials for trying to revive the old thinking.

On the way back after the party, the path was in total darkness.

'During the Cultural Revolution, at this time we finished the meeting and had to go back to work in the fields again. The difference is that at that time we did not even have enough to eat,' a voice said suddenly.

Back in the flat, a game of mahjong was arranged for my mother. My father went to have tea with one of my cousins. I was tired but wanted to check out the nightlife. A few people came to meet my father when

to inherit.

'You know, aunt, my mother is difficult to please,' I could not help saying. 'She had a few maids to attend her when she was small and she should have married somebody rich and sensitive, not someone like my father.'

My aunt laughed as if it was a funny joke. My mother laughed too, showing a kind of approval.

My mother's family was wealthy. She had told me many times the stories about my grandmother. 'My grandfather, after earning his fortune in Madagascar, came back in his old age and got married,' my mother used to tell us. 'He had a daughter by his wife but no child by his three concubines. He hired a scholar to educate my mother. When my mother was seven or eight, she went to my grandfather and declared, "I am not going to have my feet bound anymore." My grandfather was shocked. "All women from good families have bound feet. How can you have a good marriage without them?" my grandfather said. But as he only had a daughter, he always listened to her. "At least you should try to wear high heeled shoes," he finally said to my mother. When my mother got married, my grandfather gave her a shop and money so that there was no need for her to rely on her husband.'

once I visited a relative and she did not even give me a cup of tea.'

'Oh, why remember things like that?' my aunt said. 'Have a cup of tea.'

'Of course I remember all those things. How could I forget? The people here were all unkind,' my mother said.

My aunt did not answer; instead she handed me a cup of tea. 'Your mother thinks too much of the past,' she said. 'Don't forget me when you have money,' she added.

My aunt handed my mother cigarettes and my mother lit one although she had stopped smoking for some years. She blew the smoke out gently, as if sighing deeply. The smoke veiled her face and hid her wrinkles. Twilight came in from the high window of the traditional brick house and fell on my mother's white, but still abundant, hair. The cigarette seemed to have a calming effect and she sat back in the chair. She looked relaxed and elegant, even in her ordinary old cotton clothes.

Compared with the women in my father's *xiangxia*, my mother looked really out of place. Her manner is more sophisticated and her skin is fair. As she moves around, she carries her slender figure with a kind of ease and dignity that none of her children has managed

hundred thousand to restore the ancestral hall but she still could not join the dinner party. She lives in Hong Kong and she donated the biggest amount of money. They found out that if the married daughters were allowed to join, the dinner party would have to go on for three days to accommodate the large number of people.'

'But in our village the daughters do better than the sons,' my father said. Before the trip back to his *xiangxia*, my father had been saying how fortunate he was because he had a grandson and he had to thank his ancestors. In fact I did not think my father would have welcomed me back to *xiangxia* if I had not been the only one among his children who had gone to university and given him something to boast about. He had never really encouraged his children to study hard or get an education. The only advice he repeated endlessly to his children was: if there is something in it for you, do not hold on to your principles. Sometimes I think that he is as obsessed with money as I am with good stories. What we have in common is that neither of us is good at getting what we want.

My mother started complaining as soon as we sat down in my aunt's house. 'Your mother hated me,' she said. 'And so did many people here, I remember that

tables for people from Hong Kong,' her husband added. Later he told me that my grandfather had not at first allowed his daughter to marry him, saying that he was too poor. The marriage went ahead only after the Communists won, when the poor became powerful in the village.

'So that's simple, you can sit with us,' I said. My father and my two brothers had donated money to restore the hall and I knew there would be a table for my father. Those who had donated money could not only go to the dinner party, but could have their names inscribed on the wall of the ancestral hall. All the way from Hong Kong to Guangzhou, my father had been complaining that he had not been informed about that arrangement. He said, 'no one told me that the names of those who donated money would be inscribed on the wall! Once my name is inscribed on the wall of the ancestral hall, it will be there forever! When I found that out, I immediately told the stupid organizers that "of course I am going to donate money. My two sons will give money as well!" Fortunately, they have not inscribed the names on the wall yet.'

'She's a married daughter. It's the rule,' my aunt's husband went on. 'In a village nearby, they also had this problem. One of their married daughters donated two

going to the mainland always reminded her of the famine in the sixties, when she had to carry rice and everything to her brother in Guangzhou and my father's family in *xiangxia*. She went on to say how the customs officers on the mainland checked everything and asked a lot of questions and how scary it was.

'We can go and visit your old uncle tomorrow morning. It is dark already, he might be asleep. You had better come to my place for a cup of tea,' my aunt said.

On the way, my uncle and aunt continued to talk about whether the married daughters, traditionally excluded in events like the reopening of the ancestral hall, should go to the dinner party. My aunt wanted to go and was delighted to know that daughters could join if they paid two or three hundred Yuan. But her husband stopped her.

'I told her, you had better not go if you are only going to give them two hundred. Unless you are ready to give two thousand, you had better not go,' her husband said.

'Never mind that. I'm going. It doesn't matter whether they welcome me or not,' I said.

'You are not married. You are still a member of the family,' my aunt said.

'And you are from Hong Kong. They have special

his grandson. I was in Europe when that transformation took place. Nowadays when he is in a good mood, we could talk for a while.

The escalator at the railway station was out of order and my father had to pull the big bag of presents, which was bigger than him, dangerously down a flight of stairs with more than a hundred steps.

'I don't need your help!' he shouted when I offered.

The bag was tied onto a small iron trolley and every time he took a step down, he had to struggle to regain his balance. About three years ago, my father fell down the stairs when I was walking with him along a footbridge across a road. He was not badly injured but I was shocked.

Sweat ran down my father's forehead, and he was biting his lips hard. The muscles on his face twisted, the way he used to look like when he beat his children.

In that way, my father, a seventy-year-old man in his new suit, carrying the big bag of presents, struggled successfully down the stairs. My father always wears his best clothes when he goes back to *xiangxia*.

Holding my arm, my mother walked down the long flight of stairs with great difficulty. She had to stop from time to time, as if to summon up confidence. Her hand was cold and I could feel her bones. She told me that

in Guangzhou.

'How can I go back to *xiangxia* empty-handed? If I have no money to buy presents, it would be better not to go back!' my father shouted back.

'If your brothers and sisters really enjoy your company, they will be happy even if you go back without presents. They won't care whether you have money to buy them things or not,' I lowered my voice a bit, as people queuing began to look at us.

'In this world everything is money. No money, no friends, no relatives, no *xiangxia*!' My father spoke louder and louder. He has become deafer and deafer in the past two years.

'There's no point talking to him. He is a die-hard lover of his *xiangxia* and he wants to show off. It has been like that since I married him. Whenever we got something good, he always took it to his *xiangxia*. Never thought of his wife and children,' interrupted mother. 'I don't want to come...'

'What is "Hong Kong and Macau Compatriot"?' my nine-year-old nephew suddenly asked, pointing at a sign at the checkpoint.

'Oh, that means...' My father said gently to his grandson.

My father had been transformed after the birth of

During the visits there was always a long silence: he chatted a bit with my parents but most of the time just sat quietly. Then he left, with the lonely steps of a homeless traveller. He used to live in Hong Kong, leaving his wife and son on the mainland. After he had retired, he could no longer afford to stay in Hong Kong because it was so expensive. So he went back to *xiangxia*.

When I saw my parents I told them what my old aunt had predicted and suggested that we visit my old uncle on our way back.

'No, we haven't got the presents,' my father said.

'Let's go and get the presents first. It isn't far,' I said. We were staying in my father's small flat in the village.

'I still haven't unpacked,' my father said. He had brought more than fifty kilos of presents packed in three big bags. Earlier that day I had an argument with him about the presents as I had to take care not only of my mother and a bag of presents but the few bottles of French brandy and cartons of cigarette he had bought in the duty free shop on the train.

'Now you can find everything in mainland China. What's the point of taking all these things and travelling like refugees?' I finally lost my temper and shouted after queuing for about half an hour at the slow checkpoint

feeling that he had learnt his art when he was young but had abandoned it for quite some time.

Dozens of people stood and watched silently, as if they were not supposed to make a noise or as if they were hypnotized by the drum.

Most were old people or children. A lot of firecrackers had already been let off. The bits of red paper on the ground looked out of place as almost no one in the crowd was wearing bright clothes. It was the last month of the lunar calendar, the northwest monsoon had, for some days, brought the temperature down to about ten degrees Celsius. But that day, it was much warmer. The sun was behind the clouds and yellowish light fell on the weathered faces.

In the middle of all the noise from gongs, drums and firecrackers, I was introduced to an old aunt.

'Your old uncle won't live to see the Lunar New Year,' she said.

It took me some time to conjure up the image of my uncle: an old man who used to wear a well-washed Chinese-style grey cotton overcoat with four big square pockets. Even his shoes were different from the western leather shoes my other uncles used to wear: they were black cotton shoes from China. He was my father's eldest half-brother and used to visit us for Lunar New Year.

5

After attending to his father's grave, Fong So came back with a vivid description of the life and people in his father's home village. When the ancestral hall in my father's home village reopened after a major restoration, I wanted to go.

At that time I had finished a collection of short stories about the people I met during the last ten years when I travelled. Of the twenty stories, only two of them were set in Hong Kong. It seemed that it was more difficult for me to write about Hong Kong or China.

'You might have a hard time with your parents,' Fong So reminded me.

'If I am prepared for it psychologically, it won't be that bad,' I said. But it did turn out that bad.

The lion started dancing in the afternoon in front of the ancestral hall in *xiangxia*, my father's home village. The man beating the drum looked old and I had the

father got angry, he turned his anger on his children, beating us even though we had done nothing wrong. I've made up my mind to control my anger so that it won't hurt others. Now it's impossible for me to change myself,' he answered, with his black face.

After Fong So's mother had gone back to the States, I thought about the stories she had told me. What is important to her seems insignificant to me. Without going through what they have gone through, I can never understand how they feel, why they behave the way they do. If I want to write I can only write what I have experienced myself.

With that revelation, I dropped the novel, which I had been working on for months and got nowhere with. I began to write short stories based on my experience.

Yes, their past belongs to them, not to me.

was young,' I said. 'When I was young, I could hardly get a positive response from them. Even when I got a good result in an examination, my father said, "just because the whole school is so bad. Look at the children of uncle so-and-so, they are really good."'

'I don't like to argue,' Fong So's mother said. 'When Fong So's father lost his temper, I remained silent. Then he couldn't get angry with me.'

'In that case, doesn't it mean that you talked less and less and eventually you had nothing to say to each other?'

'That's true. In fact that was what happened.'

Fong So has inherited that quality of his mother's. Whenever I lose my temper, he remains silent for as long as he can. Usually he sits there and I shout, the way my mother used to shout. His face turns black as I go on with my provocative monologue. That black colour often stays on his face for more than twenty-four hours. Once I watched his face carefully and could not help laughing. Since then I call him 'black-faced cat' every time I lose my temper. The more we quarrel, the less he speaks. Gradually, it becomes more and more difficult to communicate with him.

'Why don't you say something? I prefer you shouting at me than staying silent,' I said to Fong So.

'I don't want to. When I was small, whenever my

woman, as he could not afford to have a family of his own.

When our relationship started, Fong So's salary was just about two thirds that of mine, although we were both in journalism and he had ten years more experience than I. *The Nineties Monthly*, the current affairs magazine he had worked for for seventeen years, was not a totally commercial magazine. That was why Fong So had never left it, although he had got better job offers. Fong So's mother emigrated to the States when her middle son was thirty-six. Had she stayed in Hong Kong, Fong So might have remained single. More importantly, he would have never tried to become a painter.

After the dinner, we went to a cafe. Fong So's mother saw a group of young people wearing black clothes.

'Why is everything black here? It seems to me that the whole city is in black, as if everyone were going to attend a funeral. In the States it's not like that,' she commented.

One thing Fong So's mother wanted to do was to meet my parents. They met in a restaurant.

Afterwards, she was puzzled. 'Why did your parents argue all the time? When one says something, the other immediately says, "that's wrong!" They're very strange.'

'They have been like that all the time, ever since I

'Well, they are like that,' Fong So's mother said after the phone call. 'In the States I don't need to rely on anyone. I get my pension from the government. In Hong Kong old people have to rely on their children.'

When I talked to Fong So's mother I did not find the sense of insecurity my parents have. Probably she was more secure than she used to be. When she was in Hong Kong she had kept Fong So's flat legally in her name. Many years after she had emigrated, Fong So finally became the legal owner of his own flat which he had partly financed, at the beginning, for his elder brother. The flat, chosen by his mother and brother, was less than four hundred feet square. It overlooks a huge, noisy flyover, which did not exist when his mother chose it. I was shocked by the poor living conditions when I first visited Fong So. I asked him why he did not find himself a better place.

'I could not sell the place and buy another one, as I was not the legal owner. I could not afford to rent another place with my modest salary because I had to support my father's family in Guangzhou and gave money to my two brothers in the States to buy their own houses. Now I have paid enough to all my family members. I bought myself back.' Fong So said and added that he thought he would never have a relationship with a

'Mother owes our little brother something,' Fong So's elder brother said. 'He had stayed in Guangzhou until he was more than thirty and went through all that. Mother should give him some help now.'

It was only after being checked into the hospital that Fong So's mother stopped her baby-sitting job.

'Are you happy in Hong Kong?' I asked Fong So's mother after she had finished the mangoes.

'Yes, I'm happy here,' she answered firmly.

'Now Fong So's younger brother has emigrated to the States, you can come back to Hong Kong,' I said.

'No, I won't consider that. The medical services in the States are much better than here. That's very important for old people, you know. Whenever I need to consult a doctor, I can call and make an appointment. In Hong Kong I have to queue for hours in front of a public hospital,' she said.

Our conversation was interrupted by a long distance call from the States. It was Fong So's elder brother.

'He said one of our aunts wanted to buy a certain kind of preserved plum from a shop in Shamshuipo... Her favourite snack, two bags...' Fong So said to us and turned back to the phone. 'Hasn't your mother got enough to carry to the States? Please remember your mother is no longer twenty.'

gone to Shanghai to study, like my brother, if there had been no Japanese invasion.' She looked around Fong So's flat and sighed. 'Life is so good in Hong Kong! In the States, you can never find such tasty mangoes as these from the Philippines and Thailand.'

'Are you happy in the States?' I asked her.

'No. I can't say I am happy there. It's true that there are friends who play mahjong with me every weekend. But I can't say that I am happy there. I went to live in the States just because I wanted to get Fong So's younger brother out of China,' she said.

In the States, Fong So's mother lives on the ground floor of her eldest son's house, next to the garage. Her room looks neglected compared with the upstairs living room where her son's family lives. She used to help baby-sit her youngest son's two children. We told Fong So's elder brother that they should not let her do so when we visited them in the States.

'The one-year-old was heavy but your mother could not help holding him. It's bad for her back,' I said to Fong So's elder brother.

'And the three-year-old was so difficult to handle, shouting and demanding attention all the time. How can you ask a seventy-three-year-old woman to look after these two kids?' Fong So asked in frustration.

he was sensitive enough to say, "take one!" I took one to my mother-in-law, I still remember how happy she was when she got that mango.'

It was not difficult to understand why Fong So's grandma was so fond of his mother: she gave birth to three sons. Fong So's father was the only male descendant of his family. In the past three generations there was just one son in each generation. Fong So's father's first wife gave birth to a son and a daughter.

'Where do you want to have dinner tonight?' I asked Fong So's mother. After having meals with her in the States, I had got to know that she was very picky with food and got upset if the food was not to her taste. Like my mother, she came from a rich family.

'Any restaurant in Hong Kong is good enough for me. In the States, I can't even buy a chicken which walks on the ground. The fish there are boring, always the same: cod, salmon, catfish, all tasteless,' she commented.

'How about Japanese food? There're a lot of Japanese restaurants in Hong Kong,' I asked. Fong So and I love Japanese food.

'No. No. No Japanese food! I don't like the Japanese! I don't like their food either! I have tried it. Their bowls are black in colour. Strange.'

Then she repeated what she had said. 'I would have

'Of course, I didn't cook,' his mother said with good humour. 'My mother-in-law did everything for me. But once, on Lunar New Year's Eve, she refused to kill a chicken for me, saying that the one I had bought was too small for the reunion dinner. I held the chicken in my hand and didn't know what to do. I had never killed a chicken myself,' she laughed.

'I can kill a chicken,' Fong So said. He has told me that when he was young, he used to prepare the dinner so his mother could have a meal when she came home from work.

'I've never learnt how to cook,' his mother resumed. 'Before I got married I went to school and passed the time playing Chinese dominoes with the other girls. Sometimes we played for the whole night. My father was in Canada and we lived on the money he sent back. If the Japanese had not invaded China, I would not have met Fong So's father... My mother-in-law was very nice to me, all I had to do was to take her a little food whenever I came back from outside, just a little food. My brother used to run an ice-cream shop in Guangzhou. Once I went to visit him and saw that he had mangoes. I knew my mother-in-law loved mangoes but I also knew that they were very difficult to get. So I just said to my brother that his mangoes looked really fresh. Of course

a late spring day. From time to time, a chilly breeze came up, making us more conscious of the warmth in the flat.

'He used to run a noodle shop in Guangzhou; he made good dumplings,' Fong So's mother said. 'I always ate there. Later he went to Burma. When there was trouble in Burma, I spent a lot of time and money to get him out. He managed to go to Macau, via Hong Kong, as a refugee. I remember I went to Macau and said to him, "in order to get you out, I have nearly used up the money left behind by our father."'

'He used to work as a cook for the airforce during the Second World War. They were called the Flying Tigers,' Fong So added. He really enjoys talking about his uncle. 'He was interested in food and he was always the one in the kitchen. When I was young, I was his assistant when he cooked. He liked to handle big creatures. Once he wanted to cook a big turtle. But it was really too big, so he bought only half of it. He also told me that there were four ways of handling the ginger: crush the ginger flat without cutting it, cut it into thin slides, cut it into tiny strips and mince it. Each way would bring out a particular favour in the ginger and make the food taste different,' he said. 'Mother, I cook better than you,' he teased.

like that fake stuff in the market.'

It was a pleasure to hold those stones in my hand and look at them carefully. A few of them gave me an icy sensation.

Fong So's mother finally got a ring she liked. It cost a few hundred. She hesitated, although Fong So was the one who was supposed to pay. Fong So and I tried our best to persuade her to take the ring because we did not want to spend time looking around again. Afterwards Fong So's mother walked around the bazaar to look for some presents. I helped her with the bargaining, in the hope that she would buy all the presents she needed. Both Fong So and I hated shopping. In the end, she bought nearly a dozen pairs of earrings. Never had I bargained so enthusiastically in my life.

'Jade always makes good presents. They like to wear earrings when they go to parties,' Fong So's mother said, referring to the family of her elder daughter-in-law who are Burmese Chinese. They left Burma after the anti-Chinese movement.

'Tell me something about your elder brother,' I asked Fong So's mother when we were back in Fong So's flat. She looked relaxed, as if she had finished a difficult task. It was afternoon, we were eating sunshine-colour mangoes, her favourite fruit, in the hazy light typical of

mother. It is said that a piece of good jade is priceless, as it can work like a guardian angel and protect its owner from evil and bad luck. Fong So and I were ready to spend at least a few thousand Hong Kong dollars to get a good piece for Fong So's mother although neither of us wears jade. As the jade from Burma is said to be particularly good, we wanted to get a piece of Burmese jade.

'As long as it's a jade ring, it's good enough. I don't want to spend a thousand dollars on a ring. I want one which costs less than a hundred,' Fong So's mother said and refused to take any ring in the shops we took her to.

Finally we went to the jade bazaar in Kowloon. It was the first time I had been there and I was surprised by the lively atmosphere. In front of the bazaar there were some old men, dressed in costumes similar to those of ethnic minorities, holding larger pieces of jade and talking with groups of jade admirers. In the covered bazaar were stores selling inexpensive pieces. Some storeowners claimed that their pieces were ancient jade, which had witnessed all the dynasties in Chinese history. They liked spending time showing their potential clients special pieces, which were not displayed.

'Hold it and feel it yourself,' one storeowner said. 'It is real stone, not plastic. No colour has been added, not

and I were, at that time, more friends than lovers.

There was one thing Fong So's mother really wanted to do in Hong Kong: buy a jade ring. She used to wear one but it had broken. Like many Chinese, she believed that it would be better to have another one and the jade in Hong Kong was better than that in the States. Jade always attracts me because of the legendary qualities the Chinese have associated with it. Fong So enjoys talking about how to judge whether a piece of jade is good because he learnt that from his uncle, his mother's elder brother, who had been a jade dealer in Burma. He always added, though, that his uncle was better at boasting about his knowledge than actually doing anything.

'My uncle used to say he had a lot of really good jade and he hid it in the ground,' Fong So told me more than once. 'It was impossible to take it out of the country. The immigration officers would have taken it away. He said one day he would go back to get his jade and he believed his jade would wait for him as jade can choose its owner. But my uncle died before the situation in Burma allowed him to go back. My uncle also told me that he used to get horsemen from the hill tribes to smuggle jade out to the markets in Thailand.'

We went round the jewellery shops with Fong So's

when he was with his mother and brothers. He lost his usual sound judgement and, sometimes, even his common sense. He behaved like a child in front of his mother and could only do what he was told.

So when I heard that Fong So's mother was coming, I made several decisions: I would not accompany them to their so-called home village although those ritual things sounded like good raw material for my novel. It meant that Fong So would not need to behave like a child and a man at the same time. Also I would think of her as an old woman who has gone through all the ups and downs of China's recent history and try to listen to her life story patiently. After all, like many of the women in her generation, Fong So's mother was admirable in her way: she came to Hong Kong to look for a living in the fifties. She got two of her sons, Fong So and his elder brother, to Hong Kong in 1962. Besides raising two sons all by herself, she had to support her third, who lived in Guangzhou with her husband, along with her husband's first wife and their son.

A few days before taking the plane to Hong Kong, Fong So's mother was checked into the hospital because of a sudden change in her blood pressure. That reminded us that Fong So's mother was seventy-three and that it might not be appropriate for us to tell her that Fong So

medicine, as if he was going to a poor village on the mainland, he said that I should travel light.

After the long flight I was exhausted and went to sleep after greeting Fong So's mother. A few hours later, she told Fong So to wake me up to go to China Town to buy some presents for his brothers and sisters-in-law because I had not brought along any presents.

Fong So obeyed her despite the fact that I had been working long hours for months and was sick before the trip. It took us more than an hour, by bus then by train, to reach China Town. When I was back in Fong So's brother's house again, I was too exhausted to eat. But still I had to sit at the dinner table, try my best to eat and chat for more than two hours.

'We should stay in a hotel,' I told Fong So after the dinner. 'It's too much for me if we stay here.'

'Mother would be very upset,' Fong So said. 'Every time I come I stay here. And this is the first time I have brought along a girlfriend, after all.'

The price of not staying in a hotel was high, we quarrelled all the time with each other as we tried to adapt to the lives of Fong So's relatives. My impression was that we spent most of our time either eating or waiting to be taken to a restaurant.

That trip told me that Fong So was a different person

4

'When was the last time your mother saw your father?' I asked Fong So.

'Around 1994. She didn't go to see him often, not even before she went to the States.'

'If she didn't go to see your father when he was alive, why bother to look after his grave?'

'I don't know. You'll have to ask her when you see her,' Fong So said.

Of course I did not. I automatically censor myself when I talk to the older generation. When I was a child I was beaten or scolded for 'talking back' to my parents or elders.

My first encounter with Fong So's mother did not encourage me to speak to her freely. A few months after the death of Fong So's father, I went to the States to visit her. As Fong So had gone a few days earlier, taking lots of presents like dried seafood, tea and Chinese

you are here.'

'So I can still come back,' she said. 'You know, Hong Kong is livelier than the States. I'm always stuck at home when I'm there. I can only play mahjong at the weekends. When I'm back in Hong Kong, I can go everywhere with those aunts and other old friends. But I won't stay long here. This time, I only stayed for two weeks. I'm on welfare. I can't leave the States for more than thirty days each time.'

'You should join a tour group to Beijing or Shanghai next time.' I said. 'And spend less time in Hong Kong so that you don't have to go shopping for other people.'

'Yes, I'll go north next time,' she said. 'By the way, are you going to come to the States this year?'

'No, not for the next two years,' I said, 'or even longer.'

'Why?'

'I need to work here, on my paintings. I want to get enough paintings for an exhibition,' I said. 'And I want to be left alone.'

Looking back at the past two weeks and mom's stay in Hong Kong, I have mixed feelings. I cared about mom. I wanted her to feel comfortable during her stay. At the same time, I did not want to spend too much time looking after her. She seemed easy-going and calm to other people. But in fact she was quite stubborn and restless. With her in my flat, I could not do anything, or do any painting. Whenever she was indoors, she was on the phone. She was not comfortable with the way I had turned my flat into a little studio, leaving no space for a sofa.

'We used to have two bedrooms,' she said.

'Yes,' I said. 'Now I only have one. I need space to paint. This studio is still too small. I'm hunting for a larger one.'

'What are you going to do with this flat?'

'Sell it, or rent it out,' I replied.

'Where can I stay the next time I come back to Hong Kong?'

'I don't know. But I can arrange something,' I said. 'Please don't take any orders for shopping the next time you come. It's tiring to go shopping and you can't carry heavy luggage. And I have to tell you honestly: I can't paint at all when you are here. I am not saying that you are not welcome here. It's just that I can't paint when

hundred and told him to keep the change.

March 31, 1999

My elder brother rang long distance, to tell me that my mother had arrived.

'She's pretty well,' he said. 'Her baggage wasn't inspected by the customs officers.'

'I told the check-in counter that she could not manage her baggage and needed help on arrival,' I said. 'She has problems with her wrist. In fact, she didn't need to take this trip. What's the point of going to your father's home village to see a ceremony in front of those tombs? What's the point of coming back to Hong Kong and shopping for all those relatives and friends in the States?'

'She knows those people. She accepted all those orders from them. I didn't ask her to do all that shopping,' my brother said. 'I just told her to go to the home village. She had to go; and she wanted to go - at least once. I will tell her not to go any more. Or we will go with her.'

'No. It's no good for mom. And no good for you either,' I said. 'Just leave those people in Guangzhou alone. They won't be happy to see you; and you won't be happy to see them.'

'All you have to do is pay thirty dollars more. You know how much you will have to spend: about thirty dollars from here to Kowloon Station, another hundred and something for two people to take the airport express . If you give me a hundred and eighty dollars (HK $180), I'll take you straight there.'

'That's good,' I said. 'My mother hasn't seen the suspension bridge connecting Tsingyi and Lantau. Can you tell me why you are making such a good offer?'

'Business is no good. I've been driving around for forty-five minutes, without getting a customer,' he said. 'I was about to go to the airport to wait there for customers.'

'How long will you have to wait there?'

'About three hours,' he said. 'I'm going to have dinner there while I'm waiting for business. I have to eat anyway. It takes more than an hour to finish the meal. In fact, I'll wait less than two hours. It's worthwhile. I can get about two hundred and fifty if I pick up a customer there. But I don't know when I can get someone to hire me even if I drive around for another forty-five minutes in the city. You know, the economy is really bad now. People are spending less and less.'

The ride to the airport took thirty-five minutes. The taxi driver was more than happy when I gave him two

Yesterday, Hark came over to accompany my mother. We spent the morning buying a jade ring for mom in the jade bazaar. We talked for hours in the afternoon. We went to Hong Kong Island to have dinner. Then we visited Hark's studio. After that, I told Hark that she had spent too much time with my mother. I had no choice but to spend time looking after my mother, but I had not expected Hark to spend so much time with her.

March 30, 1999

I rushed my mother to the airport this evening.

Over the past few days, I took her to all the places she used to go to before she emigrated. She visited the Taoist temple at Wong Tai Sin, Kowloon City, Shumshuipo, Tsimshatsui and Jordan. She did a lot of shopping. I had to stop her from time to time to prevent her from carrying too heavy a suitcase back to the States.

I did the packing for her. Her suitcase was really big.

I hired a taxi and told the driver to get us to Kowloon Station where we could take the express train to the airport.

'I can take you to the airport,' the taxi driver said.

called home village again. It's no good for you.'

'You're right,' she said. 'I will join a tour to Beijing or somewhere else the next time I go to mainland China.'

March 28, 1999

I could not work with my mother in my flat. I could not even sleep well. I let her have my bedroom. I slept on a mattress on the floor in the sitting room, which is also my studio.

She has problems with her lower spine and cannot walk well. During the daytime, I have to take care of her. Even though she goes out with those aunts, I am practically on call.

For example, when she goes to play mahjong with those aunts, I have to take her there before I can get away. Then I have to wait for her to call, pick her up, and take her home. The day before yesterday, she went to the temple on Lantau Island with an aunt in the morning. I was not supposed to go with them. I took her to the place where she was going to meet that aunt. She went home earlier than expected and called my mobile. I had to cut short what I was doing almost immediately.

March 24, 1999

This is the last day of my Guangzhou trip with my mother. I took my half-brother and all his family members out for a dim sum treat in the morning and went to the art materials shop to hunt for paper. I told my mother and my half-brother bluntly that it was much more meaningful to do something for the living than to perform the ceremony for the deceased.

I got four rolls of six-foot paper and three rolls of four-foot paper. They were so bulky that they scared my mother. My half-brother was not happy either but he said nothing.

I took the 1.40 bus with my mother back to Hong Kong.

I could see that my mother was not really happy about the paper I had bought. She said it was too bulky and heavy. She also said it was difficult to paint, and even harder to be a painter. I told her I needed to try and I had not had the chance until now.

'I don't understand,' she said. 'You're on your own. I can do nothing. I'm too old.'

'Yes,' I said. 'I'm on my own. I can muddle through on my own. All you need to do is take care of yourself. After this trip, don't ever go to Guangzhou or the so-

'Who's going to come back and live here?' I asked my half-brother and his mother.

'Nobody,' said my half-brother. 'We only come back once or twice a year.'

'It is the ancestors' house. It is about to collapse and you are turning a blind eye to it!' my other mother yelled. 'You are all heartless! That's what you are!'

'Enough,' said my half-brother. 'I don't want to argue with you now.'

She continued to mutter.

I turned away from them and talked to the man.

'It looks like a deserted village. Most of the houses are empty.'

'Oh, yes,' replied the elderly man. 'People either go to the city or abroad.' Then he named many people whom I had never heard of before.

'I used to work in Guangzhou,' he said. 'I came back some years ago after I retired.'

I gave him an understanding nod and told him to help himself to the roast pig.

We left the home village before five in the evening. At nine, when we were back in Guangzhou, the art materials shops were closed.

grandparents and great grandparents were there. Some tombstones were erected in 1993, obviously by my father. According to the inscriptions on the tombstones, those were the graves of the 20th, 21st and 22nd generations of the family.

After seeing all those graves, we went back to the ancestors' house again. In the village of Daizhai (the word literally means a mansion), all houses were old and small. A few fellow villagers were there to share the pig and the goose. That was their way of getting a treat and showing courtesy. An elderly man came to speak to me. He told me to rebuild the ancestors' house in order to get a place to 'sit for a while' (have a rest) on future visits to the home village.

My other mother said the same thing. She had talked about rebuilding that village house all the way from Guangzhou to the home village. She had lived for many years in that old house before moving to Guangzhou in 1958, one year after my mother went to Hong Kong to earn a living to feed the family. She was obviously restless when she was in the home village. She muttered a lot and complained about everything, especially about how the rituals were performed.

'I have been telling them to rebuild the house for years,' she said. 'But they haven't done anything.'

house was located, was two to three kilometres away. We went there before we proceeded to all those graves.

The first one we visited was my father's grave. It was on a slope facing a road. On the opposite side of the road was a small pond. The inscription on the tombstone indicated that he was the 23rd generation of the Fong family.

Several yards higher up the same slope was another grave belonging to an unknown ancestor. There was no tombstone. No one knew anything, not even the name, about that ancestor.

The helpers tidied up the two graves and helped us to offer the roast pig and other sorts of food there. The ritual ceremony continued with the burning of red candles and incense and paper money for the underworld. For most of the time I looked on, while they performed all the rituals. Then they cut up the roast pig and the roast goose to treat those onlookers who happened to be there or pass by.

The second graveyard was high up on the slope of another small hill. It was another grave with no tombstone. They repeated the ceremony of offering everything once more.

Then we went to the graveyard two hundred metres behind Daizhai Village. All the graves of my

brother would feel better if we did not sleep under the same roof as he and his family - even for a few days.

It was a chilly day. The temperature was around thirteen to fifteen degrees Celsius. In the evening, the temperature dropped further. The next few days were expected to remain cold and damp. Mom opposed the idea of going to Hangzhou. This trip will probably end after tomorrow's visit to the home village.

March 23, 1999

The visit to my so-called home village in Kaiping began early in the morning. We hired a van, an eight-seater, for the journey. My half-brother, his wife, his son and his mother, my other mother, came with us.

It took us almost four hours to get to Chishui, the town nearest my home village. An uncle of my half-brother was waiting there in his town house. He had prepared a roast pig, a roast goose, and some other things necessary for the ritual. There were four other men in a mini lorry. They were temporary helpers, assisting people from the city to perform the rituals in front of the graves of their ancestors in their home village. The home village, Daizhai Village, where my ancestors'

March 22, 1999

The cross-border bus started at 8.45 and we arrived in Guangzhou before one o'clock.

I got a hotel room in Guangzhou Building, a new hotel near the house where I spent my childhood. The house was a one-storey bungalow when I was young. In the early eighties, my father and my half-brother had the old bungalow demolished and built a three-and-half-storey house with my financial help. In the past, the legal owner of the house was my mother. Before the policy of reform and opening the country to foreigners, properties owned by overseas Chinese and the so-called 'Hong Kong and Macau Compatriots' were left untouched by the Communists. So my family had managed to keep the house. Now the legal owner is my elder brother, who lives in the United States. It is the home of my half-brother, his wife and their three grown up children. His mother - my 'other mother' - lives with them.

The house is not in good condition even though it is less than twenty years old. The staircase is particularly bad for old people who cannot walk well. That was why I insisted that my mother, who has back problems, should stay in a hotel. Moreover, I was sure my half-

the late sixties or early seventies, the city government cleared the graveyard to build residential houses. My grandmother's remains were removed and taken back to her home village in Kaiping. One month after my father's funeral, his ashes were taken back to his home village.

I have never been to Kaiping. I was born in Guangzhou. When I was eleven, I went to Hong Kong and know nothing about my so-called home village. I said I was not keen to visit Guangzhou and I did not like the idea of going to my so-called home village.

'Neither do I,' said my mom. 'I wouldn't go there if your father wasn't buried there.'

Her plan is to hire a car in Guangzhou to go the home village.

'I don't want to stay there overnight,' she said. 'We must get back to Guangzhou the same day.'

She packed everything, mainly the gifts she had brought from the United States.

I told her we could go north to visit Hangzhou, a well-known picturesque city near Shanghai, after we had been to the village. She vaguely agreed to go, if Hark could join us.

'I'll try to get some art supplies on this trip,' I told her, 'either in Guangzhou or in Hangzhou.'

on the phone, talking endlessly to all those aunts, one after another. I did not give the sketch a strong sense of light. Light is always neglected in Chinese painting. If I can find a way to add light, my paintings will look very different from the traditional ones. In fact, I have already tried to do that in the painting of the 'Street Cat'. I think I should do it again and make light part of my paintings.

I only had a few hours. That is only enough for one sketch with colour. Hark and I picked up mom at 5.30 and took her out for a treat. We dined at a famous restaurant. After the meal, we spent several hours with mom in the lounge of a hotel where Hark and I have spent many weekend evenings. By the time we left, it was well after midnight.

March 21, 1999

According to the schedule, I am going to Guangzhou tomorrow with mom. Actually the place she needs to visit is the home village of my father. She has to go there to see the graveyards where my father and my grandmother are buried.

My grandmother died in Guangzhou in 1958. We had her remains buried in a graveyard near the city. In

outing. They looked like having a dog show. Some time last week, I dreamed about their dog show. In my dream, a photo of the dog show dissolved slowly into a painting.

I intend to paint the dog show. In my painting, the owners and their pets must look similar. According to one of them, a fat and talkative fellow, pets usually look like their owners. I would say instead that the owners usually look like their pets. I have already painted the hunch-backed woman feeding a street cat. I am going to paint the dog show some day.

March 19, 1999

Today again, I took mom to the gang of aunts and got away to Hark's studio to make more studies of the calla lilies.

The two bunches of flowers were blooming so beautifully that I was able to make a better sketch. When I applied colour, I tried to make a subtle background with a beam of light. The final effect was satisfactory. Now I am ready to turn it into a painting.

I took a sketch back to my flat yesterday and coloured it this morning. I did the colouring while waiting to go out for breakfast with mom. She spent the whole time

had not had enough cash, but those aunts had some to spare. She wanted me to take her to the flat of the rice-selling auntie to return the money, and the gang of four would play mahjong for a whole day.

March 18, 1999

I took mother to rice-selling auntie's house in the morning. I left her there to play mahjong with the gang of aunts and managed to get away to Hark's studio.

It was a humid day. Everything was wet. Even the staircase leading to the studio was wet with condensation. The floor of the studio was not dry either. That was not a good day to work on Chinese painting. So, for the third consecutive day, I continued to do the studies of calla lilies.

The humid weather was good for flowers. The two bunches of white calla lilies I had bought three days ago looked beautiful and elegant. I made two more sketches. I thought I had begun to know calla lilies much better than before and could surely paint them.

In the evening, I went downstairs to feed the two street cats in Centre Street. Then I went to the little place where some dog owners took their pets for the evening

and went to the airport to wait for her arrival.

She showed no sign of fatigue after the fourteen-hour flight. The first thing she did when she was in my flat was to seize the phone and call all my aunts. She talked and talked over the phone for half an hour and fixed her meeting with them right away. After unpacking her bags, she asked me to take her from Kowloon to the other side of the harbour to visit the 'rice-selling auntie', who used to keep a shop selling rice. When we arrived, three aunts were waiting there. My mother and two of the aunts came from the same village and knew each other in their childhood.

My cousin, the son of one of those aunts, took us out for a treat at noon in a restaurant. Then the gang of four went shopping in the afternoon. I did not have to accompany them. I went to see Hark and made another sketch of calla lilies.

I went back to my flat at six in the afternoon. Mother came back half an hour later.

She said it was too late for me to prepare the evening meal, so we dined out. After the meal, she finally said she felt tired. She took a shower and went to bed at ten o'clock. I typed my notes after she had gone to bed.

Before she went to bed, she told me she had spent two thousand dollars shopping with those aunts. She

I do not like the city of Guangzhou, and I have very few emotional ties to my family members there. The only thing I got from the two visits to Guangzhou last year was a sketch of my father.

My mother left Guangzhou in 1957. From 1957 to 1987, she was in Hong Kong. Then she emigrated to the United States. During the past ten years, she has returned only once. That time I was still working as an editor of *The Nineties*. She complained that I was too busy and that I always neglected my own life. She believed that I should emigrate to the States, but I was not keen to go. She was worried about 1997. At that time, I could not say I was not worried about the situation after the handover. But somehow I remained in Hong Kong.

Now I am no longer an editor of any magazine. I am trying to pursue a career as a painter. It will not be easy. I will have no income for some time, perhaps for years. I am sure my mother will not like that. She will have a lot to say about me and I will have to listen, even though I disagree with her.

March 17, 1999

Mother arrived early this morning. I got up at 5.45

3

About a year after the death of Fong So's father, around the Ching Ming Festival, the day in spring during which the Chinese visit the graves of their ancestors, Fong So's mother came back from the United States. She went to mainland China to look after the grave of her deceased husband. In the notes of Fong So, there was a vivid account of his mother's journey.

February 19, 1999

I might have a hard time when my mother comes to Hong Kong. She is planning to stay for more than two weeks. During her stay, she will visit the mainland to perform certain rituals for the first anniversary of my father's death. I am expected to accompany her to Guangzhou and my father's home village.

A few years ago, when I was in New York, a friend who studied fortune telling took me to an old man who was nearly ninety. He was well known in the Chinese community and he told me that he had told the fortunes of more than eighty thousand people. It was the first time I had consulted a fortuneteller.

'You are having a hard time with your parents,' he said.

And he was right. Whenever I saw my parents as an adult, I would have to relive the dark days of my childhood. And being nice to my parents was like betraying the little girl in me, who, I believed, had been badly treated. I was so divided and depressed that nearly every time I saw my parents, I argued with Fong So afterwards. Our relationship deteriorated to such an extent that Fong So moved out of my studio and went back to his flat.

A few months later Fong So admitted he wanted to make up to his mother, in a way, by doing more for my parents.

'I can't do anything for my parents, so I want to do more for yours,' he said.

making it very hard for me to study, especially before examinations. As a male role model he was so off-putting that I had difficulties having a close relationship with Chinese men. My ex-boyfriends were all foreigners.

My way of escaping from his terrible presence was by hiding in the room I shared with my sister and trying to read whatever I could find: textbooks, old newspapers, fiction, anything.

There were many times when I could not control myself and hide.

One of those times was when he 'freed' the old dog which we had kept for more than a decade. The old dog was sick and my father decided to take it to the hill nearby and abandon it. I always regret that I did not take it to a vet, give it an injection and spare it a slow and painful death.

Another time was on the first day of the Lunar New Year. When we were having the first meal of the year, my parents started arguing furiously with each other. My father said all the bad things one can imagine to my mother, like wishing she would die or have an accident in that year. My mother cried bitterly for hours before she fell asleep. 'You should not say such bad things to mother on Lunar New Year's day,' I shouted at my father in hatred.

with some of her friends in their homes. When I was small, sometimes my sister and brothers could not go back home because my mother was not there and she did not give us the key.

Trying to stop my parents talking about the past, I talked about the Buddhist nun in Thailand again, 'that Buddhist nun said that my fate works well with that of my father and we have a chance of winning the lottery if we buy the ticket together from a fat woman with dark skin.'

'Really?' my father laughed. My mother laughed too.

'As I'm retired and have plenty of time, perhaps I should walk round the off-course betting centres in Hong Kong to check if there is a fat woman with dark skin working behind the counter... Then I'll call you and we'll buy a lottery ticket together.'

My father and I have never followed the advice of that fortuneteller and bought a lottery ticket together. To me it was strange to hear that my fate and my father's were entwined. I have disliked him ever since I was small because he was bad tempered. When he was at home and not arguing with my mother or scolding his children, he often turned on the radio very loudly to listen to football matches or horseracing or Cantonese opera. On Sundays, he sometimes played mahjong at home,

he was on those Sundays when the guests left, the chandelier was turned off and the flat fell into sudden darkness, because he knew my parents would start quarrelling. I did not know that he was also disturbed by those dinners. I only knew that I had made up my mind not to have children because I feared I would behave like my parents when I grew up.

My parents still quarrel, after more than two decades.

Yes, my mother would start recounting, crying at the same time, how she came to Hong Kong, worked hard in a factory and helped my father to come to Hong Kong; how she took care of my father when he arrived in Macau; how he took no notice when she gave birth to the children; how my father had his mistress when she was bringing up his children and how she went to work as a cleaner in a factory, so that she could support the family, even if her husband left her.

Then my father would say how often my mother got drunk and how terrible she looked.

Ever since my mother started to believe that my father had another woman, she had drunk more and more. I had never asked my father about his mistress. Looking back, it might not have been such a bad thing that my mother made up her mind to go to work in a factory. Before that she spent a lot of her time playing mahjong

Suddenly I thought of the Sunday dinners my parents used to hold in the late sixties and early seventies with uncles whose families were on the mainland. Those uncles had no home. They slept at the back of their small shops. The dinners were actually feasts. My mother, an excellent cook, usually prepared so much food that there were loads of leftovers, which the family would eat for many days afterwards. During the dinners, the grown-ups talked about how the Japanese killed children and how people ate people in the war. Then they went on to talk about the situation in China. Their faces, illuminated by an old and faded chandelier given to my father by his boss, showed a sentiment I could not name. I still remember the long silence following the news that meat, for the first time after the Cultural Revolution, appeared in the market of my father's home village. Sometimes, one or two of them got drunk and started cursing the war and everything in the world. After the dinner, the chandelier was turned off and my parents started to quarrel in the dim, sad light that usually lit our home. It was as if the conversation had made them homesick and depressed. It seemed that, in the Japanese invasion, they had lost not just their home but also the key to happiness.

A few months ago, my youngest brother, five years my junior, talked to Fong So. He told him how horrified

rely on men. If it had not been for the war... I would not have married you and my life would have been much better.'

'Your life would have been much better if you drank less and got drunk less often nowadays,' my father moved into the attack.

'If I drink, it's my business. If you don't like to stay here, you can always go to your mistress's place. I didn't care if you didn't come back home twenty years ago and I care even less now...' retaliated my mother. The family dinner was moving out of control fast. It was a depressing familiar situation.

'Another fortuneteller, a Buddhist nun, I met in Thailand...' I tried to stop the argument by changing the subject.

'Yes, that nun's face was very striking. She really looked like Buddha!' Fong So added quickly. After dining with my parents several times, he had got to know how bitter their arguments could become.

It was around the Mid-Autumn Festival. The moon was bright but the moonlight could no longer come in through the window of my parents' flat, as it did when I was young. The flat has been totally surrounded by high buildings. The hill behind the flat has been removed. In its place are housing estates.

'Sometimes ones's destiny is affected by the place where one stays,' my father said again. 'Your uncle used to live in a village where the sons always died. According to some sayings, that kind of place is called the land of the moon. When there are more than fifteen men in that village, some of them will die. It is just like the moon. The moon wanes after the fifteenth. That's why your uncle moved to my *xiangxia*. Now he has several sons. The Feng Shui of my *xiangxia* is good, that 's why we have a lot of sons...' Feng Shui, which means the wind and water, refers to the fortune of a place.

'Your *xiangxia* was good?' laughed my mother in disbelief. 'It was backward and full of flies. The people there were rough. When I first went there, your mother even told me to get two big buckets of water from the well... I told her I had never fetched water from a well in my life. My *xiangxia* was much more civilized,' she started to shout.

'Your *xiangxia* is the most civilized place in the world...' my father shouted back.

'Of course my *xiangxia* is good,' my mother said. 'There are rivers and white mulberries. It was called the place of rice and fish. The women were able to earn their living by working in the silk factories. Many of them stayed single all their lives. They did not need to

the next day, a dentist came. He asked if there was a sick person in the house. He pulled a decayed bone from my gum and I recovered. One of my maids is still alive in my home village, you can go and ask her if that is true...'

'Yes, you are a god...' said my father sarcastically.

'No, I'm a not a god,' my mother retorted. 'If I were a god, I would not have come to this world. I would live in a happier place. When I was young, there was an old man who used to sit near a bridge. Once a young man asked him what he was waiting for. He said he was waiting for a human being to come. The young man said to him, "there are so many human beings around, can't you see?" That old man sighed deeply. "These are not human beings, they are demons. That's why we have all these wars and sufferings," he said.'

'I am not a demon,' said my father hastily. 'Only my family think that I'm not good. I get on well with people. Your cousin's husband just called me and asked me when I would go back to *xiangxia*. He said he was going to take me somewhere picturesque...'

Xiangxia means one's home village, the place where one was born. My parents were born on the mainland and they came to Hong Kong as new immigrants in the fifties.

to consult him. The fortuneteller pointed at your uncle and said, "you will starve in future" and then pointed at me and said, "but you will not." It turned out to be very true. I went to Hong Kong. Your uncle stayed on the mainland and went through the famine and the Cultural Revolution...'

'Your grandma also made very accurate predictions,' my mother said. 'Your grandma said to me many times that there would be more banks than rice shops. That is the case in Hong Kong...'

'According to all those books about palmistry,' I said to my mother, 'you are a blessed person, you have such beautiful hands.'

'Well, my life hasn't been that bad, in a way,' my mother said. 'I was born into a rich family and I have been a worker of the lowest rank. I have seen war and peace. When I was a few years old, I was sick for a long time. Your grandma was very sad, she prayed and made offerings to God. She said, "my first daughter has died, my second daughter is dying. Is it heaven's will that I should have no daughter?" No doctor could cure me. My mother was preparing for my funeral when one day I woke up and told her, "in my dream, someone told me that a man would come to our house tomorrow and he would cure me." Your grandma did not believe me. But

Financial Crisis and fortune telling was one of the few professions that did good business after the downturn.

My parents liked the topic.

'After talking about Asia, that fortuneteller suddenly asked me how many brothers and sisters I had. I told him. The fortuneteller shook his head and said there was one more. Then I remembered that one of my younger brothers had died shortly after birth. Perhaps that fortuneteller wanted to show me his ability,' I said in a dramatic voice to show how impressed I was.

'What did that fortuneteller say about the future?' my father asked enthusiastically.

'He said Asia would have a hard time for some time to come.'

'Why do you need a fortuneteller to tell you that? I can make that kind of prediction as well. The tide has turned and the good times for Hong Kong have finished,' my mother said.

'Well, what one will have in life is already fixed in one's destiny...' my father commented loudly.

'Your grandma could also tell fortunes. Besides studying history and poetry, she studied palm reading and face reading...' my mother said.

'I met a good fortuneteller when I was in Guangzhou,' interrupted my father. 'Two of us, your uncle and I, went

2

'Your parents are old now. They are very difficult, but consider what they have been through: the Japanese invasion, the hard times when they first came to Hong Kong...' Fong So said to me time and again when I complained about my parents.

His father's death made me look at my parents with more sympathy. Also I was thinking of devoting all my time to writing instead of having a job. My parents would not like that. So it was better to meet them more when I was working and avoid them when I did not have a job.

With the help of Fong So, my parents and I had, in my mother's words, 'the most enjoyable dinner we have ever had.'

During the dinner, I talked about the fortunetellers I had met or interviewed in Thailand and Cambodia. It was about a year after the beginning of the Asian

Communists came to power in 1949, he remained unemployed. Before he died, he lived with his first wife and their son in Guangzhou. Fong So seldom visited him.

After some months, Fong So told me that during one of the political campaigns, his father 'disappeared' from home for almost a week.

'No, he thought my elder brother would. He said to my elder brother that the sons of so-and-so had got their fathers to the States.'

Shortly after that conversation, I forgot Fong So's father. At that time I thought that the only effect of his death was that he made Fong So and me forget our cold war. But that was not the case.

Six months later, Fong So's father appeared in front of me: in a pastel portrait painted by Fong So. Later Fong So turned it into a five-foot larger-than-life portrait, painted with Chinese ink.

According to Fong So's elder brother, their father was a bad tempered man, who had beaten him so hard that his eardrum suffered permanent damage and he had to use a hearing aid. But the old man in the portrait was a horrified, helpless old man. On his head was a tight hat which looked heavy and hard.

At that time I was trying to write a novel about the relationship between a middle-aged woman and her parents, with what had happened in mainland China and Hong Kong in the past few decades as the background. I asked Fong So to tell me the life story of his father. But he seemed to know very little about him. Among the few things Fong So could say was that his father once worked for the Kuomingtang army and after the

workman in the funeral parlour spend some time closing it before the ceremony,' Fong So added after a long pause.

'Has he got something unfinished in his life?' I asked.

Many Chinese believe that when one leaves something unfinished in one's life, one will die with one's eyes open. My mother told me that my maternal grandmother died with her eyes open. It was not until my mother said to her that she would make sure that her two brothers got married and had families that my grandmother closed her eyes.

'I think he was not happy that he ended up in Guangzhou.'

'Where did he want to die? In his home village?'

'No, in Hong Kong, or in the United States. He had lived in Hong Kong for a short time in the early fifties but went back to the mainland because of my grandmother. My grandmother had a lot of influence over my father. She became a widow when my father was five and she brought him up on her own. My father always wanted to go to live in the States because my brother and my mother were there. I think that is why he lived until eighty-six: he was waiting for something.'

'Your elder brother had tried to get your father to the States before he died?'

It seemed to me that he was more disturbed by the way the funeral was conducted than by the death of his father.

'There is only one funeral parlour in Guangzhou, so all the rooms for ceremonies are fully booked. My half-brother has some connections with someone in the crematorium and he paid the workmen there for a special favour. The workmen turned the heat higher so that the bones of my father would came out in whole pieces. People on the mainland have no choice but to cremate the bodies of the dead, but they still want to bury whole pieces of bone,' Fong So added.

'Where are his ashes buried?'

'In his native village. In Guangzhou, you are not allowed to bury the ashes in the ground. It can only be done in the villages.'

Then there was a silence.

The shadow of our cold war was still there. Fong So's father was then a total stranger to me. The only thing I knew was that Fong So's mother was his father's second wife. When he married Fong So's mother, he already had a wife and children in his home village. According to Fong So, his father did not tell his mother he was already married.

'One of his eyes was open when he died, I saw a

'As soon as possible, I have the magazine's publication deadline to meet.'

Fong So was then the managing editor of *The Nineties Monthly*, a current affairs magazine. He stayed in Guangzhou for less than two days.

While Fong So was working day and night to meet the deadline, his father died. A few days later, he went to Guangzhou to attend the funeral. Guangzhou is the largest city in South China, some 180 kilometers from Hong Kong.

'The ceremony was much shorter and simpler than I could ever have imagined,' he told me. 'It lasted for a quarter of an hour, or even less. About twenty relatives attended the ceremony. We had to wait outside the room where the ceremony was held for about half an hour. Then came my father's dead body in a simple coffin. The funeral parlour was run by the government. A man appeared and announced that "The ceremony for saying goodbye to the remains of Mr. Fong Ping Cheuk" was to commence. Then the music was turned on, the same music used in the funerals of those Beijing leaders, but only for about twenty seconds. We followed the man's instructions and bowed three times to the body. Then the man announced that it was the end of the ceremony,' Fong So said slowly.

1

When Fong So's father was dying, Fong So and I were in the middle of a cold war because I refused to tell him things about my ex-boyfriends.

'My past belongs to me, not to you,' I shouted at him on the phone.

My experience taught me that talking too much about a past relationship was no good for the present one. My ex-boyfriends found me such a good listener that they repeated their love stories over and over again, every time with more sentiment and colour. I learnt several great love stories, came to the conclusion that they were living in the past and left them.

'Listen, I am going to Guangzhou,' he said and added quickly. 'My father is in hospital. I rang just to let you know that I won't be around, in case you call me.'

'When will you be back?' I asked, shocked by the news about his father.

A Word of Thanks

It is not easy to write about the uneasy relationship between two generations. This book, which would not exist without the help and support of my friends, has made me understand more about my parents and myself.

I thought of writing this book after reading some of the notes written over the past two years by Fong So, my partner and companion. In his notes, he also wrote about his relationship with his parents and even about how difficult it was to have a relationship with a woman like me.

I would like to thank Elspeth Hyams for editing the English text, Lam Chi Ming and Chan Pui Sang for commenting and reading the Chinese proof. I am deeply indebted to Florence Pang, the editor of my first collection of short stories, who has given me the support and encouragement that I badly needed when I started to write full time.

Hark Yeung
December 2000

Yeung Wai Man (Hark Yeung) was born in 1962 in Hong Kong. She was educated at the University of Hong Kong and the University of London, became a journalist and travelled widely. She is now a writer.

Fong So was born in 1951 in Guangzhou, China. He was educated at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and became a journalist until 1998. He is now a painter.

Elspeth Hyams was educated at the University of Cambridge and has worked in the Middle East. She is a journalist and currently the Editor of the UK Library Association's professional journal.

To Florence Pang

HKS(L)

Published in 2000 by Fong & Yeung Studio
Box 342, General Post Office, Hong Kong

ISBN 962-86063-1-X

Copyright©Hark Yeung and Fong So

Printed in Hong Kong by
Noble World Printing Company Limited

covers
Chinese Fong So Living Ashore 2000
English Hark Yeung Tai O, Hong Kong 2000

colour plates
1-15 Photographs by Hark Yeung
16-32 Paintings by Fong So

Images of Chinese cover and colour plates 16-32: Adopted from the exhibition catalogue *City Life: Paintings by Fong So*, courtesy of the University Museum and Art Gallery, The University of Hong Kong. Photographs by Ricky Poon and Sam Law.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Our Elders

Hark Yeung and Fong So

Edited by
Elspeth Hyams

FONG & YEUNG STUDIO

Our Elders

B21465733

Our Elders

多倫多大學利銘澤典寘惠存
香港中文大學圖書館 2020 年轉贈

RICHARD CHARLES LEE
CANADA HONG KONG LIBRARY
University of Toronto Libraries
130 St. George Street
8th Floor
Toronto Ontario Canada M5S 1A5

Not For Loan

概不外借

CANADA HONG KONG LIBRARY
3 1761 09962227 6

Our Elders

ark Yeung and
ong So

CUHK Libraries
004114912